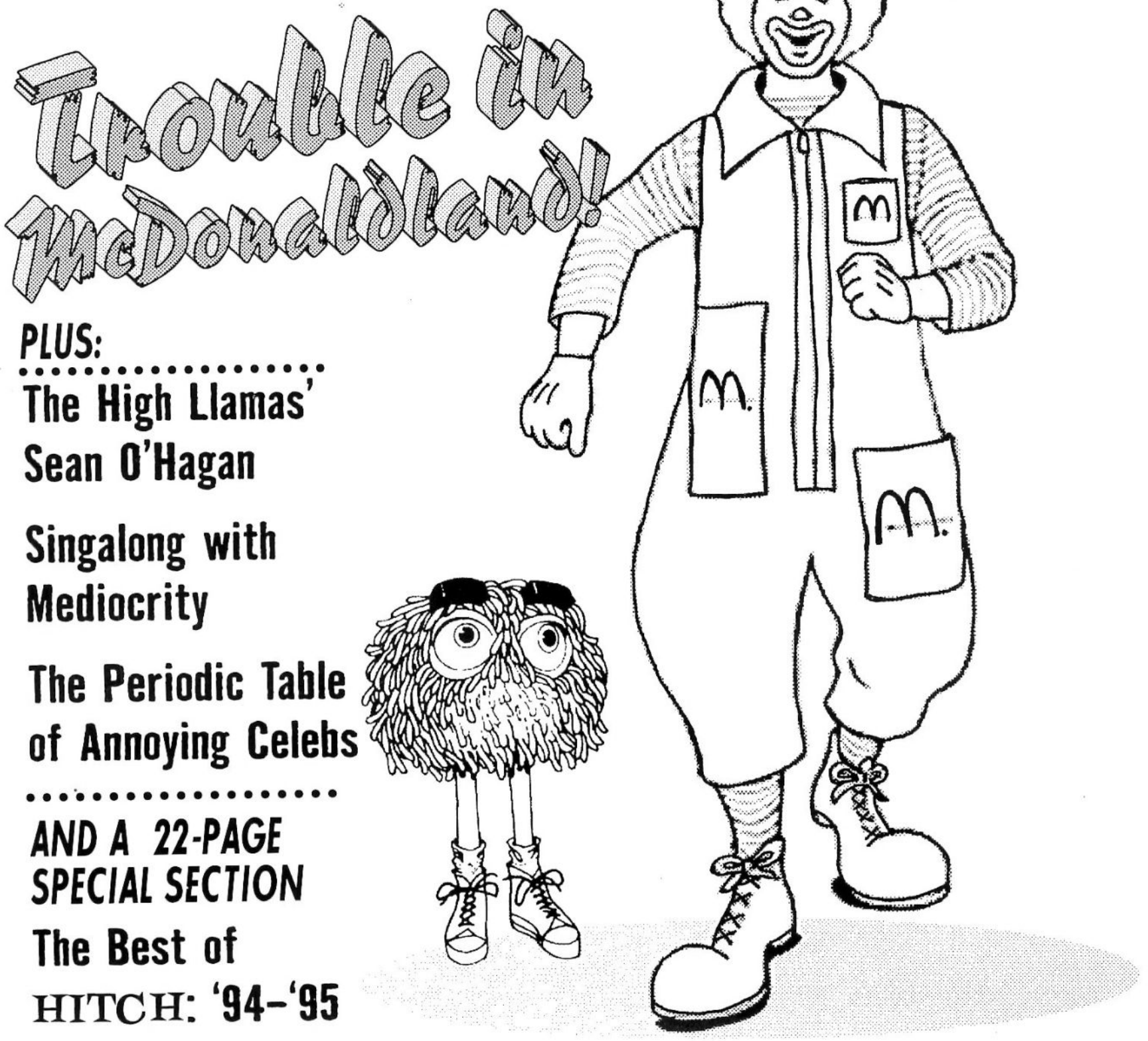
HITCH

the journal of pop culture absurdity

#20 • $4
Spring 1999



Trouble in McDonaldland!

PLUS:

The High Llamas'
Sean O'Hagan

Singalong with Mediocrity

The Periodic Table of Annoying Celebs

AND A 22-PAGE SPECIAL SECTION

The Best of HITCH: '94–'95

HITCH

#20 • SPRING 1999
WE'RE ALL THAT

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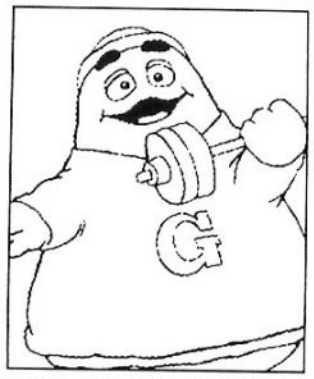
iN HITCH

the journal of pop culture absurdity

Wordy Stuff

Did Somebody Say "Heil, Ronald!"?/10 Your Filet o' Fish is anything but a barrel o' fun in the hell known simply as "McDonaldland." A McHITCH scientific treatise by Ryun Patterson. **¿Como Se Llamas?/13** Sean O'Hagan of The High Llamas rambles on and on about his music ... but we let him because we like it so much. By Tony Shanks. **I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing Something Else Entirely/14** Spice up your life! Bang a gong! I get knocked down, but I get up again! The end is near, but it sounds so *damned* catchy! By Joe Rogers. **Él Capitan: The Cotton Candy World of Mike Alway/16** Whether you're into Burt Bacharach or Henry Mancini, Sid & Marty Krofft or Peter Sellers, Strawberry Alarm Clock or Stereolab, you simply *must* acquaint yourself with pop music's most anonymous genius. By Rod Lott.



pg. 10

The Best of

Just before we celebrate our fifth anniversary, we take a fond look back at the best of our first year, 1994-95, with a special, 22-page section. **Monkey Trouble Trading Cards/21** Snip 'em! Swap 'em! By Rod Lott. **So You Wanna Be a Greek?/23** We wouldn't advise it, Chad. By Randy Hyden. **Darryl Starbird and the He-Man/24** *Race fans! Race fans! Go get that G.E.D.!* A he-man adventure by Rod Lott. **Boldly Going Where No He-Man Has Gone Before/26** My first – and last – *Star Trek* convention. Another he-man adventure by Rod Lott. **Deconstructing Mentos/29** It's been pilfered on the Internet and supposedly swiped by *Spin*, but we did it first. And best. By Rod Lott. **The HITCH Dreidel/32** Just in time for Hannukah in July ... if there is that sort of thing. By Joe Rogers. **Knick Knack, Paddy Whack, Gave My Dog a Bone/34** No, not that kind, you perv. By Ken Davis. **Some Enchanted Evening, You May Feel My Prostate/36** Goulet! By Rod Lott. **"Dear Mr. Clipson:"/39** Of all the mail our friend Bob wrote, this one was hands (and donkey dick) down the best. By Bob Clipson. **Excerpts from David Hasselhoff's Baywatch Diary/40** Only slightly funnier than the show. By Rod Lott.

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Departments

Heapin' Mailbag/3 Postcards! Poets! And more muscular disease than ever before! **Disc Dish/42** From rock to electronica, and back again. Reviews by Rod Lott. **Videos/48** All five *Planet of the Apes*, four *Psychos*, *Bikini Summer 3*, two Jennifer Love Hewitts and a cartridge spelled C-U-B-E. Reviews by Rod Lott. **Hong Kong Express/64** Chicago snowstorm + new DVD player = kick-ass karate action! Reviews by Ryun Patterson.

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HITCHBits

The Periodic Table of Annoying People with Questionable Talents/6 Fun to look at, but a bitch to scan. By Rod Lott. HITCH **Condensed Books/7** Bizarre kiddie lit. **Tom Neesnan's Belated Movie Reviews/7** *Disorderlies*? Better late than never. By Tom Neesnan. **The Robert Goulet Death Watch/7** Oh, how time *doesn't* fly. **Random Movie Still of the Month/8** This time, for our foreign readers. **Xmas on the KC Strip/9** Who knew that in the ritzy heart of the Show-Me State, Santa would be such a penny-pinching miser? By Ken Davis.

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"The truth is, I practice absurdity quite religiously." —*Alfred Hitchcock*
"Comedy is not pretty." —*Steve Martin*

Letter of the Month

Rod,

Happy New Year to you and your family. Thank you for issue #19 of HITCH; it was as fresh and funny as always. However, I was surprised to discover that my copy of that issue came with two pages, 5 and 56, that were completely blank! I can only think of three reasons to explain this:

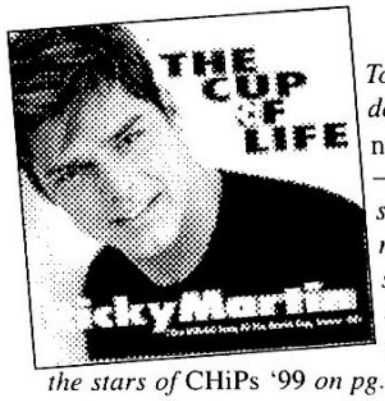
1. As the recipient of the "lucky issue," I've won some sort of contest, not to mention a big prize. (Yay!)

2. Those two pages contain material of a sensitive nature, and cannot be legally sent through the U.S. Mail into upstate New York.

3. This is part one of one of those infamous "HITCH pranks," where you taunt some poor sap for the amusement of your readers.

Whatever the reason, could you please send me the "printed" version of pages 5 and 56 from HITCH 19? I am currently accepting auction bids for my near-mint-condition copy of this unique rarity, which will come with a certificate of authenticity (signed by me), and I thought the actual pages would make a nice bonus for the high bidder.

Scott Cornish
New Hartford, NY



To address your three possible reasons in descending order, Scott: 3) We would never taunt a poor sap who reads HITCH *– at least not one who's a paid subscriber. 2) Though not of an illegal nature, those pages did indeed contain sensitive material – a horrifying picture of former Lemon Piper Richard Setter on pg. 5 and an easy, homoerotic jab at the stars of* CHiPs '99 *on pg. 56. 1) Barring some big printer's error that we don't know about ... CONGRATULATIONS, SCOTT! You are the winner in our big (albeit unannounced) "Find the* HITCH *with Two Blank Pages" Contest! (We got the idea from that clever M&M campaign.) For your expert sleuthing, not only do you get a "normal" copy of* HITCH *19 with* no *pages blank, but you've also won a CD single of Ricky Martin's "The Cup of Life," better known as the official song of the 1998 World Cup. It's on its way with the issue, so prepare yourself for Latino booty-shakin' of the highest order!*

The Usual Gushing Praise

Dear Rod,

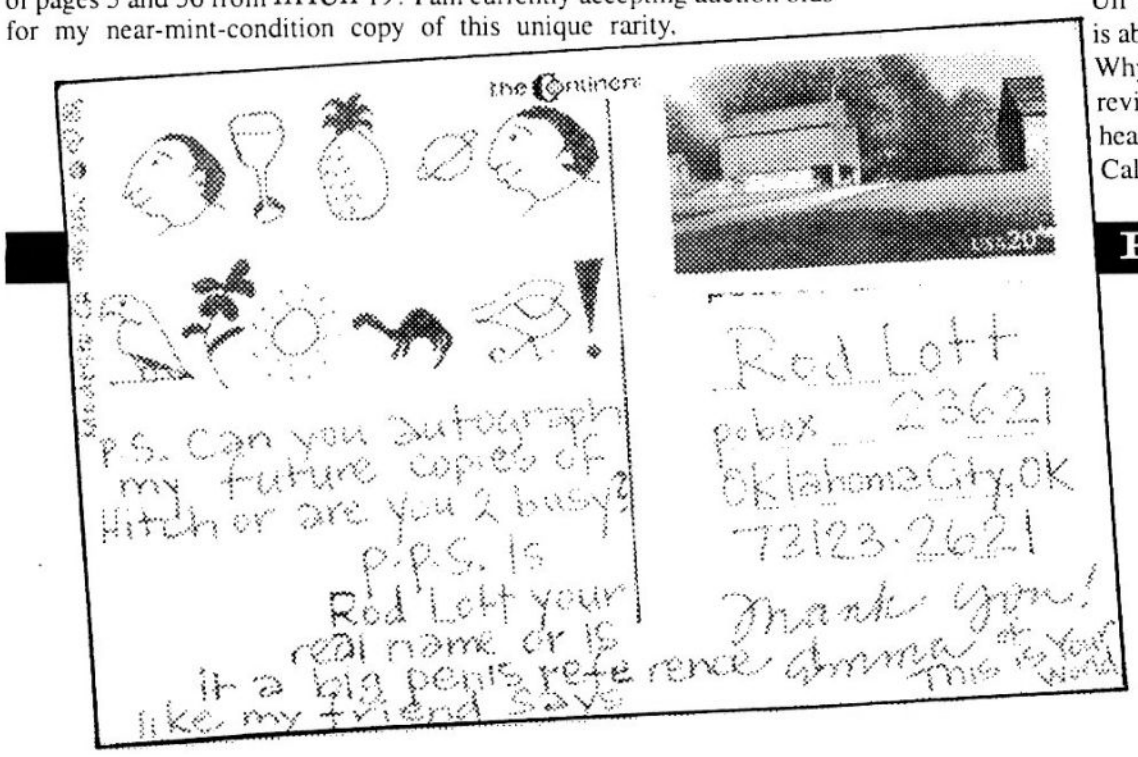
Enclosed find my check for the continuation of my subscription. Always an enjoyable read. Personally, I skip over the music reviews because everybody does music reviews and to be honest, I don't think I've found a publication yet that can make 'em interesting. But what I love are your movie reviews. They've turned me on to so many new and different titles, I have to take a list into the store (oh yeah, pure geekiness).

Anyway, maybe I'm breaking some bootleg code here, but how can one get a copy of *CNN Bloopers* ("Videos," HITCH 19)? And will you do another *Found Footage* volume in the future?

Mark Rose
Seattle, WA

Hi there.

Just got HITCH 19 today. Thank yee ... looks like fun. Here I thought that I was the only one in Sweden reading HITCH. Who the fuck is this Ulf B. Genhammar ("Heapin' Mailbag")? His prison is about 100 miles from me. Maybe I should visit him? Why can't I get into your website? Your music reviews are costing me *mucho kronor*. Have you heard of Sea and Cake? Momus? Half Film? Natural Calamity? Andre Popp? And Do Make Say Think?


the Continent
P.S. Can you autograph my future copies of Hitch or are you 2 busy?
P.P.S. Is Rod Lott your real name or is it a big penis reference like my friend says
Rod Lott
p.o.box 23621
Oklahoma City, OK
73123-2621
Thank you!

Postcard of the Month

Sorry, Emma, but you'd have to ask my wife. (For those having trouble deciphering the pictograph, please consult your handy "Stargate: The Home Game" from HITCH *19.)*

THAT'S 80?

This being our 20th issue, we thought we'd do something a little special. Some 22 pages of this issue is comprised of previously run material from the early days of HITCH.

I've long resisted putting out a "best of" edition. Steve Hunt has been trying to get me to do one since ... well, since the first year. And since we're coming up on our momentous *fifth*-year anniversary next issue, it seemed appropriate to recognize our Xeroxed past.

In my mind, I have justified this look back for a couple of reasons, foremostly because it centers only on that first year, when we really didn't know what we were doing, yet somehow managed to put out *seven* issues in 12 months' time. (Of course, they were about half the size as current issues.) Checking the subscriber list, a good 95 percent of you have never seen this material, and most of the back issues from '94-'95 have long been unavailable. (Plus, I'm really busy with other pressing projects right now, and this strategy allowed our spring issue to arrive before summer.)

Deciding what to run again was not as difficult as I first thought. Ruling only full-page articles candidates for inclusion helped, as I wasn't about to try and "piece together" smaller stories and filler items to fit nicely into the confines of our 7.5" x 10" margins. Though there are lots of great laughs in those more minute offerings, it just wasn't feasible to try and compile them. (I also did not include video reviews – no matter how memorable – as I currently am flirting with the idea of compiling some sort of separate HITCH *Armchair Video Companion* to take care of such matters.) That caveat aside, the 10 articles you *do* see really seemed to stick out as true highlights ... and reader response from subsequent "Heapin' Mailbag" entries seconded that emotion. Now you'll know the true meaning behind the long-running "Robert Goulet Death Watch." Now you can read the very *first* "He-Man Adventure." Now you have to relive the horrors of the movie

These are this month's raves from Larry. Please let me know when my sub expires. *Hava nagila* ...

Larry Farber
Varberg, Sweden

Hey Rod,

I just wanted to let you know I liked the issue. I think my favorite part was asking the store employees about their thoughts on the *Titanic* parties they were having ("*Titanic* Tuesday Takes Tremendous Task to Throw Titanirific Titaniparties," HITCH 19). It reminded me a lot of the old *Spy* magazine (ever read that when it was good?).

Ben G.
New York, NY

Hey bitch.

Nice rag. You're really outdoing yourself. The record reviews were especially sweet. I love you Lotts! Get it?

Taylor Holland
Austin, TX

Hi, Rod,

I used to be a BIG fan of HITCH and just started thinking about it again the other day. Are you still going with it? Are you still in Oklahoma? Just curious. I'm not even sure this address is still good, but just thought I'd give it a try.

Chris Sharpe
Oklahoma City, OK

All Things Muscular

Hey Rod!

I thought I'd let you know how much I enjoyed HITCH 19! You know, my days and nights are filled with the pain of this muscular disease, and knowing that you are out there spreading hope like a humorous Mother Teresa makes me think of a better tomorrow. You are, dare I say, the Patch Adams of the magazine world! Especially humorous segments were "A Furry Fistful of Feminism: Sex and the Berenstain Bears" (Will Papa Bear *ever* learn?) and "Tupperhell."

I buy Tupperware on a regular basis, as I collect the drainage from my knee in them, so I know where you are coming from, huh, buddy? I also love your movie reviews. Keep doing these. I cannot go to the movies, so I have to read about them. Your reviews help me put a picture show in my head. It is lonely here with only my AM radio, but HITCH gives me something to look forward to. Please pray for me, and good luck, Patch.

Louis Fowler
Oklahoma City, OK

Hello American HITCH Friends,

Just got reading issue 19 of your magazine of the humor. Because of HITCH, I have introduced many new words into my vocabulary, including "skeletonian," "dook," "spinkster" and "Titaniparties." Because I like magazine so much, I am in prison. Please send free issue when new one comes out. Please put Adrienne Barbeau on cover. I have muscular disease. Thank you.

Dierdorf Schzonka
Belgium

Subs & Whatnot

Rod–

With the Republicans gaining more power with each election and/or indiscretion, I thought I should send my check for renewal. When I note that Rush Limbaugh and Newt Gingrich are *both* in Green Bay *on the same day*, I realize that soon my money will be worthless ... the end is near.

With that in mind, I'm spending it while I still have it. Here's a check for a subscription renewal and a Happy Birthday subscription to my buddy Karl as well.

Darrell Patterson
Algoma, WI

Rod:

Here is some more of my hard-earned cash. Please rush HITCH *Found Footage: Volume 1*.

Debbie Daughtry
Bishop, GA

Rod–

Saw the ad for HITCH 19 on alt.zines. It's been a long time, but I ordered HITCH 12 and enjoyed it a lot!

Joe Gallo
San Francisco, CA

Dear Rod,

Enclosed is $4. Please send me HITCH 19. I saw a post about it on alt.zines.

Do you enjoy OKC? I have been through there numerous times, and have stayed in some of the outlying towns, but have never known anyone who lives there. Tulsa's one of those cities which is always behind the curve, like the overweight high school kid who always wore whatever was stylish a few years earlier.

Joel McLemore
Tulsa, OK

Rod,

Please send HITCH 19 as posted on alt.zines recently. Thanks.

David Wyder
Passaic, NJ

Rod Lott–

Please send me an issue of HITCH and any information on back issues.

Jasper Shaw Jr.
Brooklyn, NY

www.fuckup.com

HITCH:

I tried to access your website and I couldn't

find it. Would you please tell me the correct URL. I am especially interested in the Mentos info ("Deconstructing Mentos," HITCH 3).

Paula McAleese
pauls@newworldmarketing.com

Sirs,

I would like to know if I could get a free sample of HITCH newsletter or mag?

Lance Virden
Bartlesville, OK

Dear Lance: No.

Dear Rod M. Lott (Poetry Editor, HITCH):

Hello! Thought I'd send you some of my work to consider for possible use in your magazine. My poetry, fiction and nonfiction have most recently appeared in *Culturefront*, *Guitar One* and *Rollerderby*.

I hope some part of this submission finds a place in HITCH. I thank you in advance for your time and consideration of these pieces.

Holly Lalena Day
Minneapolis, MN

Holly! Long time, no hear! I take it you have never picked up a copy of HITCH *16 ("We Think That We Shall Never See..."), and for that, I say, "Whew!" As stated many previous times, we hate poetry. But yours strikes us as particularly diabolical and creepy, and for that, we hope we never meet you in person. Here are two that have us screening our phone calls:*

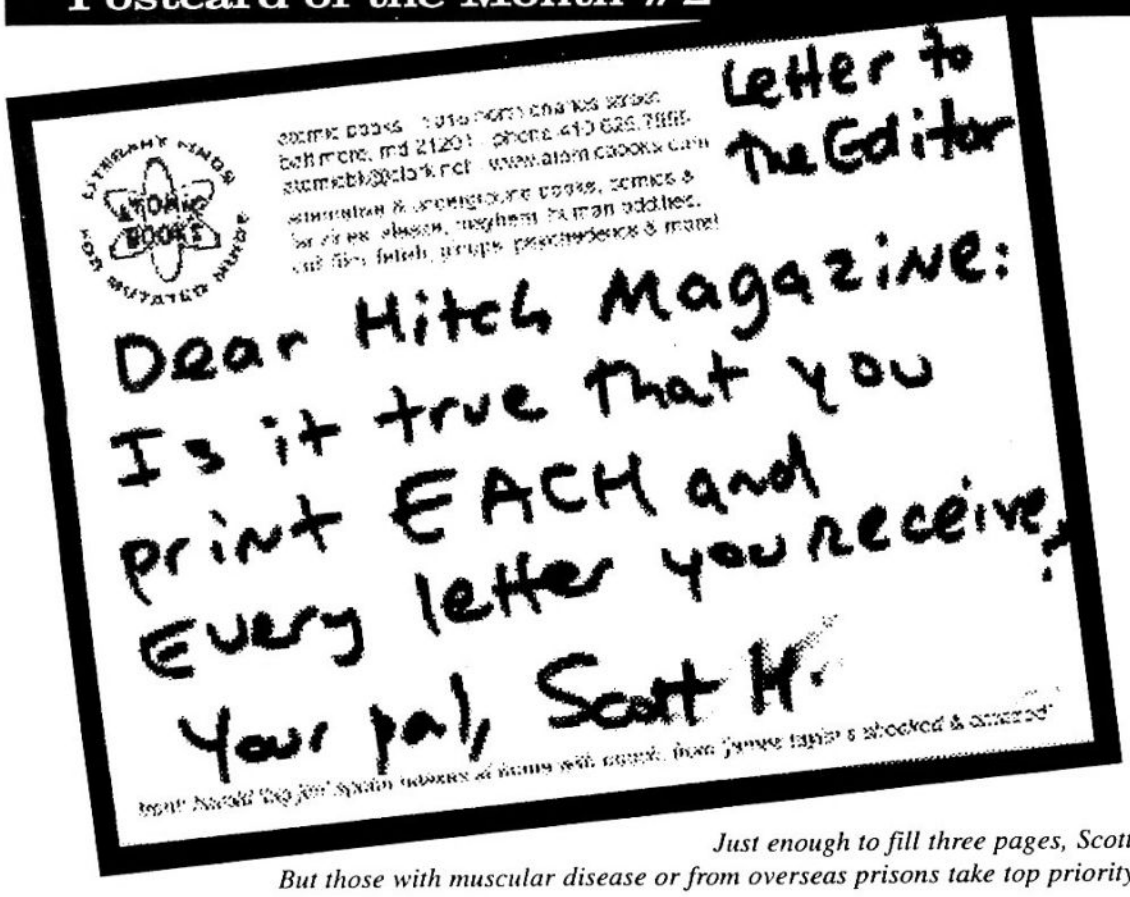
"Gunman on the Watertower"

no more voices-they fall before my anger
like weeds before a scythe
echoes of screaming women fading
from my mind. Soon there will be peace.
they never understood. I have tried so hard
to make people understand me, my complications,
my complicated mind.
All I ever wanted was a little love.
this isn't pain. This isn't anything
compared to the hurt I've been carrying
all these years. My bullets jerk bodies about
like marionette strings, rip through people
that have been dead for years. Soon
there will be peace.

"Birdie"

I walked across the restaurant
to the edge of the cliff
stopped at your table
and looked down.
You were an albino condor
tiny pink
scared eyes
looking up into mine.
Wings reaching up to me
out to me
the band played our song
you wanted to dance.
I threw my wine glass
in your face
and blinded
you crashed
a puff of cartoon feathers
and smoke
at the bottom of the crevasse.
The waiter brought the bill
and I put my half
on the edge of the cliff.

Postcard of the Month #2



Just enough to fill three pages, Scott. But those with muscular disease or from overseas prisons take top priority.

Monkey Trouble, memories of which you had no doubt fought to banish.

But before you dive in, let me disclaim the fact that most of them were written by me. This is not a case of stroking my own ego; back then, I was writing HITCH almost singlehandedly. If we were to do a retrospective of the past two or three years, it'd be an entirely different story! (As you may find years from now in issue 40.)

Please forgive the primitive layout, as these articles were laid out either by hand and X-Acto, or on a third-hand, pirated copy of an already-outdated Aldus PageMaker. Flaws in the writing, however, I have no excuse for.

I hope you enjoy this peek into "HITCHstory" as much as I did. If you like it, let us know. If you didn't and feel slighted out of an issue of all-new material, it's probably because you're a contributor ... so get to writing so I don't have to do it again.

✍ ✍ ✍

As mentioned earlier, we're thinking about compiling our first special, stand-alone edition, under the tentative title of *The* HITCH *Armchair Video Companion*. Obviously, this would consist of nothing but the near-thousand video reviews from these pages. The book also would include various movie-related articles from past issues – like our *Planet of the Apes* retrospective ("Still Dirty, Still Damned," HITCH 7) or our talk with B-action star Don "The Dragon" Wilson ("Interview with the Kickboxer," HITCH 5) – and a comprehensive index. It would be fully illustrated and *huge* (I've estimated it would run about 300 pages).

But because this would be a special edition, it would not be included as a subscription issue. To gauge interest in this idea, I'm asking all readers to let me know if: a) you would be interested in purchasing such a book, and b) how much you would be willing to pay for such a thing. At this point, I haven't priced this with printers, so that remains to be seen.

Think about it: A cool, valuable reference book to keep right under the remote! Like a big, fat HITCH without all "those damn articles!" Let me know at RLott@aol.com.

HITCHBITS

with gravy!

The Periodic Table of Annoying People with Questionable Talents

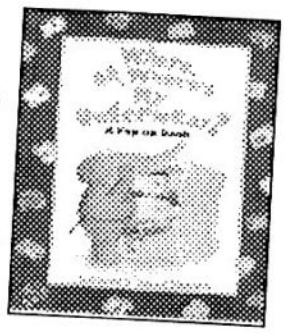
Vl *Val Kilmer*					**Lz** *Anne Heche*
Dn *Claire Danes*	**Ry** *Ryan Phillippe*	**Yh** *Yahoo Serious*	**C** *Cher*	**He** *Helen Hunt*	**JT** *Jonathan Taylor Thomas*
Bn *Ben Affleck*	**Mi** *Mira Sorvino*	**Gw** *Gwyneth Paltrow*	**Nt** *Nathan Lane*	**MP** *Master P*	**Ar** *Patricia Arquette*
Bu *Busta Rhymes*	**Ju** *Julia Roberts*	**Po** *Po*	**Jr** *Jerry Springer*	**Sh** *Charlie Sheen*	**St** *Marilyn Manson*
Rb *Robin Williams*	**Rc** *Christina Ricci*	**Pt** *Brad Pitt*	**Mt** *Matt Damon*	**Dj** *The Djiin*	**Lp** *Jennifer Lopez*

—*Rod Lott*

Nothing but the Good Parts

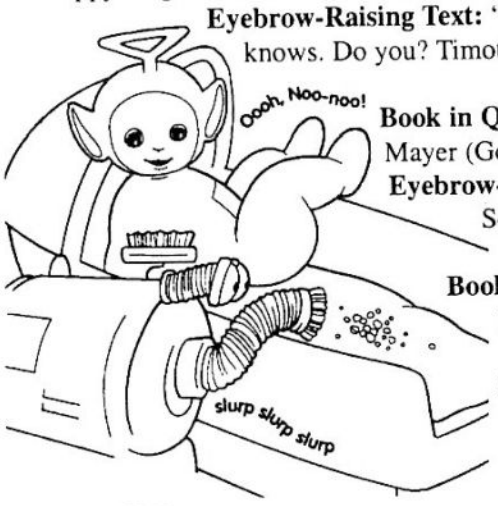
HITCH Condensed Books

This Month: Children's literature of a sexually suspect nature



Book in Question: *Where, Oh, Where's My Underwear: A Pop-Up Book*, by Barney Saltzberg (Intervisual Books, 1994)
Salicious Book Jacket Copy: "Young readers will delight in helping a young elephant find his wayward underwear in this zany pop-up book."
Eyebrow-Raising Text: "Where, oh, where's my underwear? Where, oh, where can they be? I can't find them anywhere. They must be hiding from me."

Book in Question: *Puppy Dog's Special Friends*, by Lynn Offerman and Dana Regan (Reader's Digest Young Families, 1998)
Salicious Book Jacket Copy: "Children will delight in touching Lizzy Lizard, Bertie Bunny, and Puppy Dog's other friends to find out what's special about them."
Eyebrow-Raising Text: "What's special about Timothy Turtle? Puppy Dog knows. Do you? Timothy has a hard, shiny shell!"



Book in Question: *Just Me in the Tub*, by Gina & Mercer Mayer (Golden Books, 1994
Eyebrow-Raising Text: "Then I take off my clothes. ... Sometimes Mom comes in and helps me dry off."

Book in Question: *Teletubbies: Tinky Winky's Tubby Toast*, author unknown (Honey Bear Books, 1998)
Eyebrow-Raising Text: "Tinky Winky was eating his tubby toast in bed. Dipsy, Laa-Laa and Po thought Tinky Winky was very naughty!"

—Rod Lott

Tom Neesnan's *Belated Movie Reviews*

Disorderlies
(1987)
Rating: 9 1/2 out of 10

This film, which was good, stars the members of The Fat Men rock 'n' roll band, and was a treat for me to see! So good, in fact, that I think it could be considered for an award, possibly two! In the film, an old man that has a lot of loot is at death's door, and to speed up the process of him dying, a chap hires the fat men as orderlies to watch after the old man, so he will die sooner and he will get the loot. Can you believe what you are reading??!! Ol' Tom could never do that, unless they snared his seat at this film, because it is grand from start to finish.

Pret-a-Porter
(1994xxx)
Rating: 9 1/2 out of 10

Tom did not know what to expect from this awkwardly titled film. For all I knew, it could have been a documentary on the salt mines of Port Au Prince and the effect it has on our economy. But when I watched it for about 45 minutes, I could tell that this was a film about models! Not only was it about models, but it was also really good! In the end of this movie, there is a scene that youths will want to cover their eyes in, because the girls come out onto the stage, and they don't wear their britches or their tops! That made Ol' Tom blush, but I guess it helped add to this fine, fine film!

Dudes
(1987)
Rating: 9 1/2 out of 10

This hilarious film that stars another rock 'n' roller, Fly from the popular band The Chilis, had me laughing hard, and embarrassingly, I had to ask the man behind me, who was fat, to keep track of what happened while I was out on a tablet that I was using to keep up on the good lines while I stepped out to gather myself! There were three guys in this movie and all of them were really good acting guys, and when the film ended, and they showed the names of the characters and the actors that played the individual parts, I realized I forgot to eat my goodies!!! It was that good of a film! Also, my tablet was gone, so if you are out there Mr. Fat Man, please send it to me!

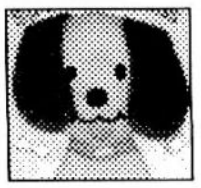
Cybernewsflash!

Heads up, gang! There is a virus that has been circulating out there called "GRRR ROAR DRAGONS!.exe." I'm sending you this vital heads-up, because I hear that "GRRR ROAR DRAGONS!.exe" literally creates not a virtual but a *real* dragon monster that comes out of your computer screen and tears you limb from limb. Gang, you mean a lot to me and I would hate for this horrific "GRRR ROAR DRAGONS!.exe" file to cause you any harm or even untimely death, especially during the holiday season.

—Steve Hunt

The Wit and Wisdom of Hefner Road Animal Hospital

- ☞ "What Are You Thankful For? Kittens!"
- ☞ "Felix Navidad"
- ☞ "Poodle Little Love in Your Heart"
- ☞ "Hot Dog! Terry's Here Grooming" / "9 Out of 10 Dogs Prefer Terry"

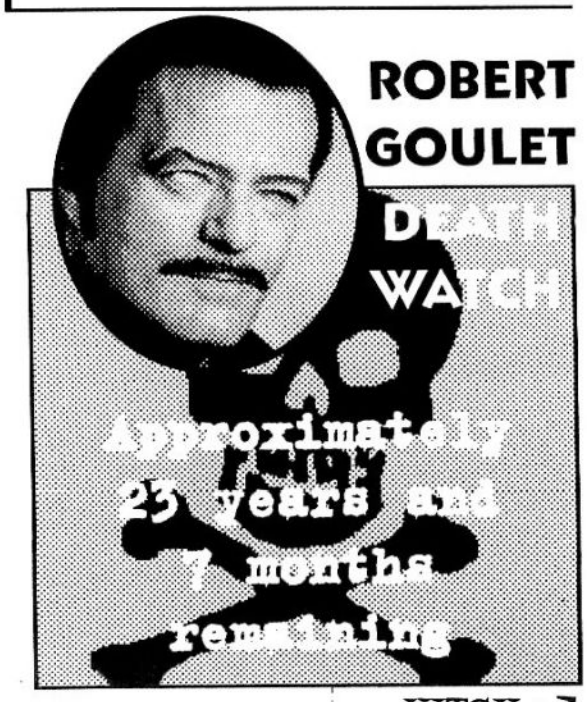


- ☞ "Great Weather! Ticks Agree!"
- ☞ "Puppy Love Day: February 14"
- ☞ "Cupid Is the Cat's Meow"
- ☞ "Tramp's Smile Dirty? We Clean!"

'You've Got Mail'
The Minimalist Review

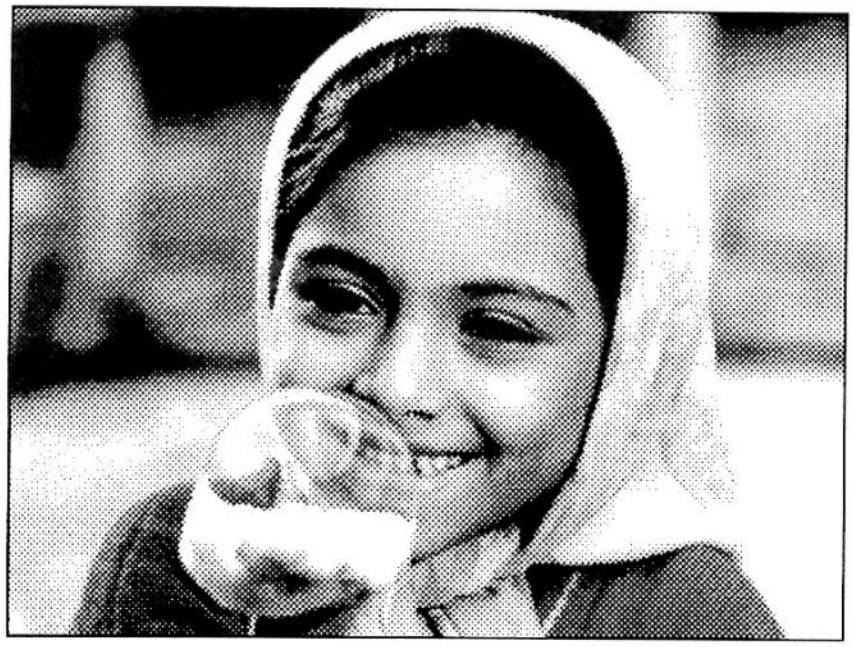
Meg was cute.
Tom was sweet.
She cried.
They got together.
There was a dog.

—from an Internet newsgroup



Say Cheese!

Random Movie Still of the Month



Bahare Seddiqi in Majid Majidi's *Children of Heaven*. (Miramax Films)

FUN FACTS

Actress Mimi Rogers was once married to twice-Oscar-nominated superstar Tom Cruise, recently starred as mom Maureen Robinson in the big-screen adaptation of that TV favorite *Lost in Space*, received an Independent Spirit Film award for her performance in *The Rapture*, and has extremely large breasts.

Two Thumbs Up (Their Asses)!

Ever Wunder?

"*Psycho* is still crazy after all these years!"
—Joanna Connors, *Cleveland Plain Dealer*, on *Psycho*

"This bug's for you!"
—*Newsweek* on *A Bug's Life*

"*A Bug's Life* should delight everyone — young, old or six-legged."
—Tom Gliatto, People, on *A Bug's Life*

"Starts with a bang and ends with a boom."
—Jeff Strickler, *The Minneapolis Star Tribune*, on *Enemy of the State*

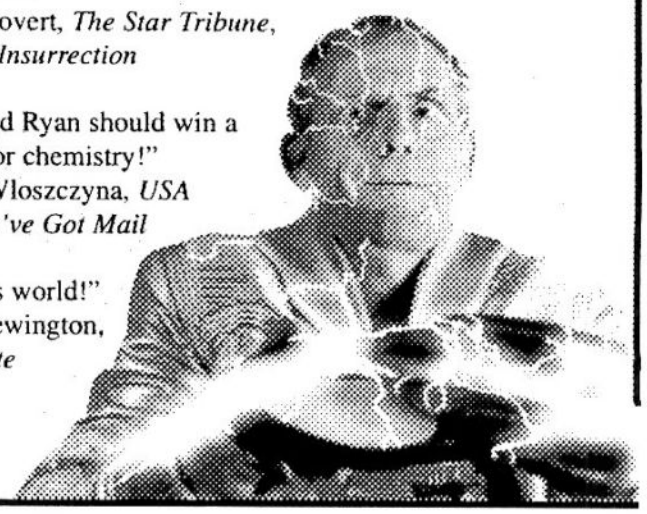
"Hog heaven. Good work pig."
—Bob Campbell, *The Newark Star-Ledger*, on *Babe: Pig in the City*

"This year's *Soul Food*!"
—*Newsweek* on *Down in the Delta*

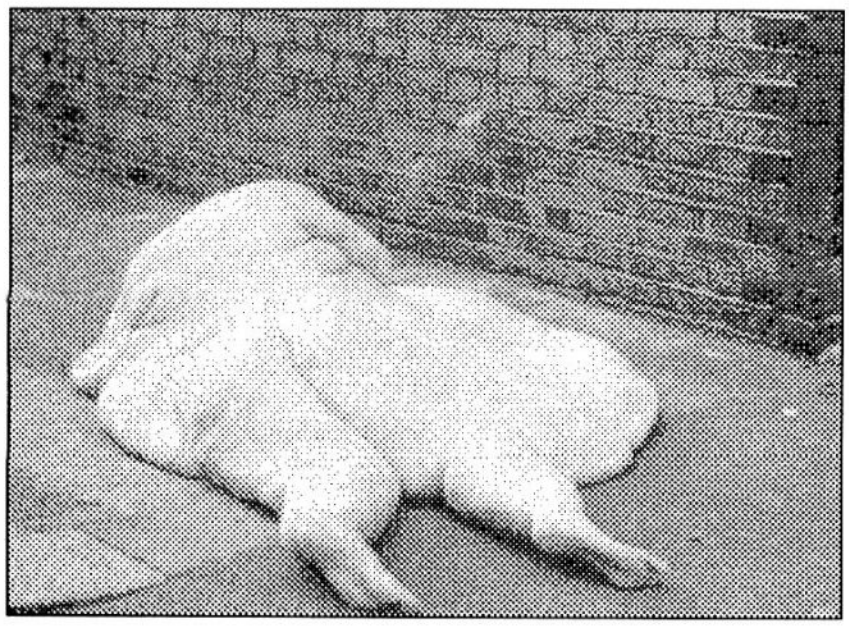
"The jokes, action sequences and special effects come faster than photon torpedoes. It boldly goes in search of a mass audience and it'll succeed."
—Colin Covert, *The Star Tribune*, on *Star Trek: Insurrection*

"Hanks and Ryan should win a Nobel Prize for chemistry!"
—Susan Wloszczyna, *USA Today*, on *You've Got Mail*

"Outta this world!"
—Ron Brewington, on *My Favorite Martian*



HITCH Paparazzi



Human Silly Putty.

Me so jealous.

Show Me R&R

Xmas on the KC Strip

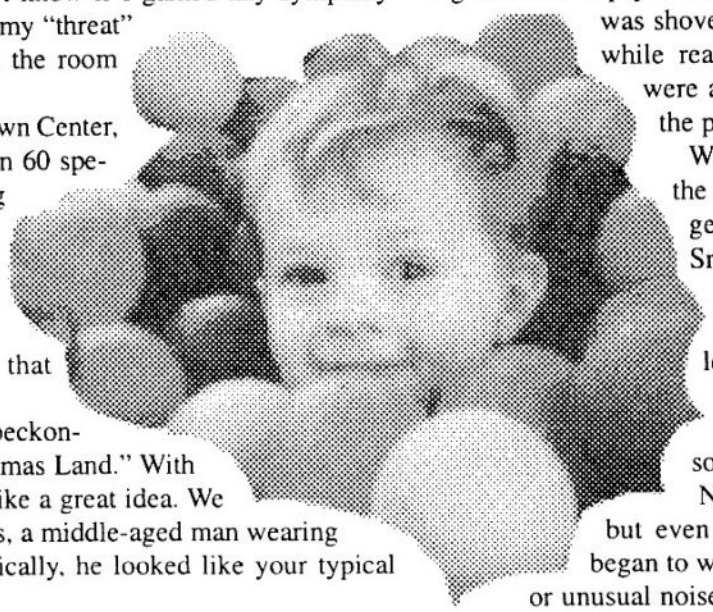
I work really weird hours and don't get to spend as much time with my family as your typical 9-to-5 breadwinners. That's why I was excited to be able to take a few days and travel north two-and-a-half hours to Kansas City, Mo. for a little pre-Christmas rest and relaxation with the wife and our not-quite-two-year-old son Taylor.

The drive up was relatively uneventful. Upon arrival we stopped at McDonald's for lunch. Our decision to patronize the Golden Arches was based not on our craving for their greasy foodstuffs, but on the knowledge that their "PlayLand" would be a chance for our son to burn off some of the energy he'd stored on the road.

And burn off energy he did. He quickly found the "ball pit" and dove into it face first, laughing and giggling like, well, a kid that's not quite two years old. After about 15 minutes of him throwing balls out of the pit with Dad retrieving said balls, I decided that it was time to head to the hotel. Our thus-far pleasant day turned ugly when Taylor vetoed my directive. He was carried to the car screaming and kicking.

When we got to the hotel earlier than normal check-in time, I explained to the cute front desk clerk that I had a cranky little boy that *really* needed a nap and pleaded with her to allow us in the room early. My desperate cry was granted. I don't know if I gained any sympathy from her or if she stopped to consider my "threat" that we could wait in the lobby until the room was ready.

After naptime, it was off to the Crown Center, an upscale retail center with more than 60 specialty shops. As with any shopping center during the holidays, parking was a problem. We eventually found a space and headed in to experience the sights and sounds, the hustle and bustle, and the outrageous prices that Christmas brings.



That kid's got some balls.

Once inside, we saw a large sign beckoning us to visit "Santa's Crayola Christmas Land." With Taylor now well-rested, this seemed like a great idea. We were greeted by one of Santa's helpers, a middle-aged man wearing blue jeans and sporting a beard. Basically, he looked like your typical pedophile.

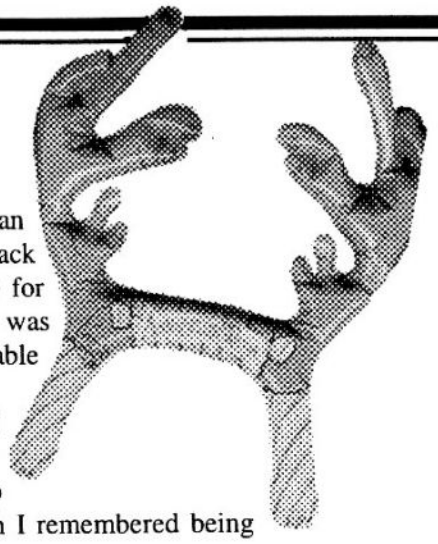
He explained the ground rules to us: "Kids have to take off their shoes, and they must be accompanied by a parent at all times," he explained. We agreed to abide by his stringent regulations and made entry.

Taylor immediately spotted ball pit and dove into it face first, laughing and giggling. "Here we go again," I muttered to myself. He began throwing balls out of the pit, which were retrieved by another of Santa's pedophile-esque helpers. He, too, was laughing and giggling.

Seeing that Taylor was in good hands, I had a look around. The "Christmas Land" was sponsored by Crayola, so there were *huge* crayons that had been used to make houses, slides, the ball pit, etc. These crayons were even bigger than my 5'9", 175 lb. frame. I kept waiting for Rick Moranis to come out and announce that we'd all been shrunk.

Meanwhile, Taylor was sliding down the slide from the ball pit. He then began climbing up the wrong way of the slide in an attempt to get back in. On his way up, he butted heads with another kid on the way down. They both began crying and rubbing their noggins. I'm pleased with myself for capturing this on videotape and I began dreaming of the money I'm gonna win from *America's Funniest Home Videos*.

Taylor was consoled by his mother, who quickly diverted his attention to Santa Claus. Taylor ran over to Santa, pulled a box of crayons out of his "goodie basket" and then ran off. We managed to get him back over to Santa and onto his lap for the requisite photo, where he was presented with a set of inflatable reindeer antlers.



After inflating them, I noted they were leftover promotional crap from the animated flop movie *Annabelle's Wish*, which I remembered being released a year earlier.

"That Santa's a cheap bastard," I thought to myself.

Then it was off to find a snack at "Topsy's Popcorn Shop," conveniently located nearby. I ordered up a large popcorn and a couple of drinks. It was only when I went to hand my money over to the clerk that I realized she had only stubs for fingers. Needless to say, she took a little longer than most to count back my change.

We found a table to sit down and, being a people watcher, I began to watch people. At another table sat an Indian female who also was enjoying some of Topsy's fine corn. I mean, she was *really* enjoying it. She was shoveling it in like she hadn't eaten in weeks, all the while reading Stephen King's *Rose Madder*. Her eyes were as big as saucers, darting back and forth across the pages.

We found a table that afforded us a decent view of the festive "Heartland Singers." They sang very generic seasonal songs such as "Frosty the Snowman" and "Let It Snow." Not one mention of the Christ child. No "reason for the season" message from this group. We were about to leave when they began their rendition of "Oh Hanukah," followed by a somber song sung in Jewish. It reminded me of the *Schindler's List* soundtrack and depressed me.

Not only could I not understand the Jewish lyrics, but even I could tell they were murdering this song. I began to wonder why security was not enforcing the "Loud or unusual noises will not be tolerated" rule posted prominently by the entrances.

After this, we were on our way to the Country Club Plaza, which is well known for its beautiful Christmas lights that adorn the buildings in the area. My wife had never seen the "Plaza" during Christmas time. She asked me, "Am I going to like it?" I explained that there are 70 miles of Christmas lights on the Plaza and that if she didn't like it, it wasn't my fault.

The Plaza is also famous for its horse and buggy rides. After bartering the price down from $30 to $20, we hopped aboard. Our driver would be Carol and the grand horse that was being forced to pull us around was Trudy. I'm still debating who is more in need of dental care.

After breakfast the next morning, we decided to make use of the hotel's indoor pool. The shallow end was inhabited by a bunch of elderly women who were doing water aerobics. Early in the morning after a big meal, the last thing I want to see is old people in bathing suits. They eventually left, leaving the pool (not to mention a thin layer of Ben-Gay on the water) for our exclusive use.

For an indoor pool, the water was still quite cold. I'm not ashamed to admit that there was some shrinkage going on, and despite that, Taylor was having a great time. He was laughing and giggling.

That is, until we told him it was time to go. He began crying and we carried him back to the room kicking and screaming.

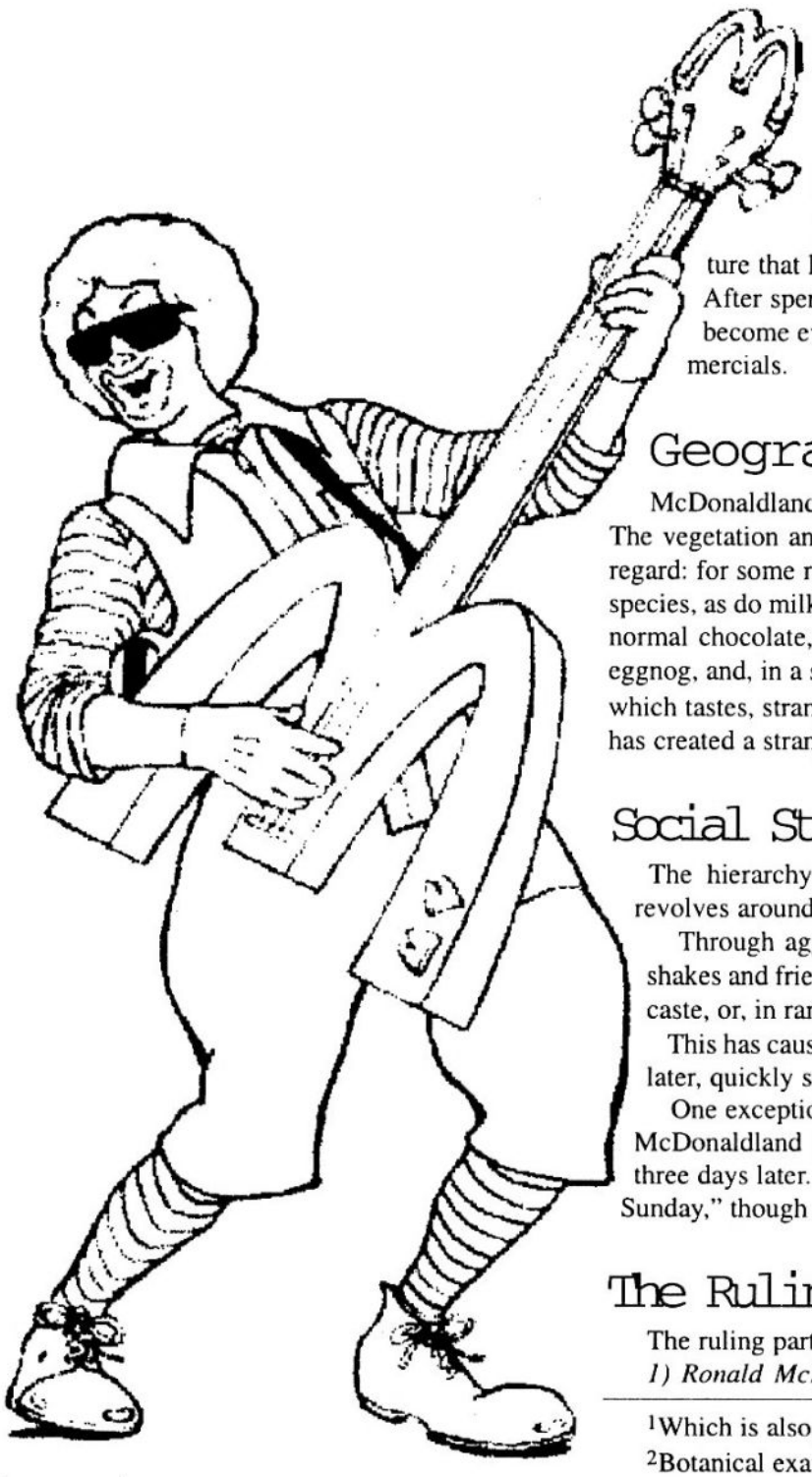
—Ken Davis

Did Somebody Say "Heil, Ronald!"?

The Sociology of McDonaldland

A McHITCH Scientific Treatise

By Ryun Patterson



The scene is all too familiar.

In a paradise of beef and potatoes, characters clad in colorful costumes engage in wacky hijinks espousing bedrock moral values and, above all, the value of a good burger.

But while this world is familiar, few, if any, understand the society and culture that has made the tiny country of McDonaldland an icon of 20th century culture. After spending several months exploring the area and observing its inhabitants, it has become evident that the real McDonaldland is far different than portrayed in the commercials.

Geography

McDonaldland is located on a Pacific island in the vicinity of the island nation of Palau.[1] The vegetation and foliage are uncommon for such a tropical area, especially in one curious regard: for some reason, burgers – of both the ham- and cheese- variety – grow on certain tree species, as do milkshakes. The milkshake trees also are distinct; at certain times of the year, the normal chocolate, vanilla and strawberry varietal plants start growing fruit with the taste of eggnog, and, in a strange convergence with the feast of St. Patrick, the trees grow a green fruit which tastes, strangely, like nothing else on earth. This, along with fields of stick-like tubers,[2] has created a strange social hierarchy within McDonaldland.

Social Structure

The hierarchy of McDonaldland society, much as in primitive homosapien behavior, revolves around the hoarding of foodstuffs.

Through aggression and manipulation, the ruling class controls the supply of burgers, shakes and fries as a means of controlling those not privileged enough to be born into a high caste, or, in rare cases, a head resembling a Big Mac sandwich.

This has caused relatively little strife; malcontents, save one citizen who will be discussed later, quickly starve.

One exception to this peace is the infamous "Hamburger Rebellion," *in which control of* McDonaldland was wrested from the ruling class only to be retaken by a vicious airstrike three days later. That bombing is memorialized in McDonaldland oral histories as "Ketchup Sunday," though few are still alive to recount it firsthand.

The Ruling Class

The ruling party of McDonaldland is composed of several major figures:

1) Ronald McDonald – The ever-smiling Ronald McDonald has little outward political

[1]Which is also, curiously, located south and just to the left of the Land of Dairy Queen.

[2]Botanical examination suggests these plants are genetic offshoots of the common potato.

power in McDonaldland; he is more of a puppetmaster, controlling the politics of the country through shrewd political manipulation and the use of his devilish good looks (and extremely large feet) to make or break anyone with aspirations of political control.

His means of control are extremely passive/aggressive. While outwardly extolling the virtues of self-reliance, truthfulness and overt goodness, he uses the confidence he gains to blackmail and impose his will upon all those with eyes on ruling the land of the Golden Arches.

His role as chief negotiator with foreign licensing lawyers[3] has given him control over McDonaldland exports as well, for no other native has the savvy or worldly sophistication to negotiate with those attempting to take advantage of the country's resources.

In short, McDonald is both a blessing and a curse to the people of his land, because while he is a major factor in controlling the populace, he also is key to preventing McDonaldland from being taken advantage of by outsiders.

2) Mayor McCheese – Although born a commoner, the fact that one Alfredo McCheese was born with a cranium shaped almost exactly like an extremely large hamburger sandwich.[4] His birth was foretold in the land's mythology, and thus he was christened as the land's ruler-protector figure, revered and loved by the masses.

He also is, unfortunately, slow-witted, which leaves his mostly good intentions to be twisted by McDonald and his henchmen. He has been credited with the emancipation of the land's former slave class, the McNuggets, but his attempts to loosen the government's control of the food crops are held in check by McDonald's scheming.

Despite his intentions, the "Mayor" of McDonaldland is merely a figurehead in a snazzy blue suit and a tall, fancy hat.

3) The Hamburglar – Dressed in a prisoner's archetypal striped jumpsuit, a wide-brimmed hat and a mask, Hamburglar represents the "Robin Hood" syndrome in McDonaldland culture.

Although his only purpose in life is to steal the ruling class' foodstuffs for distribution to the peasant class, Hamburglar is largely allowed to go about his business without serious reprisal from the government.

Many may credit this to McCheese's dimwittedness, but close observation reveals a *laissez faire* government policy in regards to Mr. Burglar.

The simple fact is inescapable: Intelligent beings, no matter how dimwitted, would not be able to overlook a big-nosed man dressed as a criminal (whose name is Hamburglar, no less) sneakily tiptoeing through town in broad daylight with armfuls of burgers in tow. One hypothesis is that this is McDonald's way of venting the proletariat's anger with the status quo, e.g., by living vicariously through the actions of the Hamburglar, peasants individually will not feel the need to revolt.

Another view of this phenomenon is that Hamburglar is merely an idiot. There is strong evidence to support this claim, and his speech patterns (a never-ending series of "robblerobblerobble"s) also support this postulation.

An interesting side note to this character's place in society is that he functions as an incredible public relations tool for the government's security forces: Whenever foreign journalists arrive in the area, McCheese always catches Hamburglar in mid-burgle, thereby validating his security forces[5] to the outside world.

4) Birdie – As the only female member of the ruling elite, Birdie serves as both a balance to the junta's masculine energy as well as an avian[6] concubine used by McDonald to keep Mayor McCheese in line if the Mayor has a crisis of conscience.

Some rumors among the peasant class suggest this feathery flirt may have been the perpetrator of the infamous "Ketchup Sunday" bombings,[7] and if this is indeed true, she is a force to be reckoned with when determining the balance of power among the elite.

5) Grimace – Seen by the outside world as a pathetic purple bag of idiocy, Grimace is, in fact, one of Mr. McDonald's closest personal advisers.

His approach to life takes its cue from Zen philosophy, as his endless barrage of questions – which seem superficial and idiotic – afford him a greater understanding of the mental and emotional undercurrents roiling beneath the emotional surface of those with whom he comes in contact.

He is the only member of the ruling party never linked to "Miss Birdie," and this has led to rumors regarding his close association with McDonald and public wonderings as to why he never wears any clothing, save an apron and a chef's hat during barbecues.[8]

6) The Fry Guys – Born to the peasant classes, the Fry Guys were hand-picked by McDonald as a means to inspire loyalty in the McDonaldland government with the peasant class, much as Adoph Hitler used his Hitler Youth program to make the masses feel connected to the sociopolitical working of the government.

Needless to say, they are firmly entrenched in the elite. Their main function is as brainless yes-men who follow McDonald everywhere. They have also been used, in certain situations, as heartless paratroopers.[9]

Ronald McDonald demonstrates a perverse method of wielding his mighty and uncontested power, here chasing the Hamburlgar with a butterfly net for his crimes against flimsy beef.

The Underclass

There are three main strata in the McDonaldland underclass: the servers, the fry-people and the nuggets. While these groups all operate under McDonald's red thumb, they have specific roles unto themselves.

1) The server class – As its collective label suggests, the server class ekes out its existence by collecting[10] the harvested ecological booty[11] of the country and processing the burgers, shakes and potatoes for export. Physiologically, the servers are identical to the humans living in

3Probably the same guys who thought of *Pinochet: The Animated Series*.

4He's also got a really swell hat.

5Death squads.

6Not Evian, avian. As in "bird-like."

7Recently recovered U2 studio sessions have revealed ... aww, you got the joke already. Forget it.

8Like in that movie where George Costanza played that gay guy.

9Nothing is more disheartening like big French fires giggling as they mow down enemies of the state with Kalashnikov assault weapons.

10And individually wrapping.

11What's another name for pirate treasure?

greater Micronesia,[12] which means one of two things occurred in the atoll's history:

• The servers migrated to McDonaldland, at which time they were enslaved by the freakish dominant class, or

• They were actively enslaved and brought from their previous homeland to provide manual labor.[13]

Either of these guesses may be true, but the end result is the same: For better or worse, this group seems destined to be disenfranchised by the franchise which rules their day-to-day lives. No opportunities are offered for upward mobility to these people; their only escapes from the misery of everyday life are the promise of an extra burger or two in the burger lines and nighttime dreams of children who dream of donning the guise of Hamburglar and exacting revenge upon the upper class with daring daylight robberies[14] and crafty burger heists.[15]

2) The fry-people – The fry-people of McDonaldland exist to harvest the foodstuffs which keep McDonaldland functioning. While physically resembling packages of golden, crunchy french-fried potatoes, these intelligent beings have a complex biological structure beneath their starchy exteriors[16] which endows them with great stamina, yet little strength, making them ideal plantation workers. The fry people are able to work nearly 23 hours per day, requiring nothing but 40 minutes of sleep and an essential meal of sodium chloride[17] to survive. The fry-people were the initial fomenters of the lone rebellion against McDonald and his cronies, and they were the harshest hit by the deadly airstrike.

"There was the stench of burnt fries that lingered for weeks after that terrible Sunday," one elderly fry-person said during his daily salt rub.[18] "Despite the horror of it all, I acutely remember getting sort of hungry."

There are rumors among the fry-people that progress is being made on a great longboat which will eventually carry the fry-people to a beautiful land of plentiful salt, but nothing has come of it to date.[19]

3) The nuggets – The saga of the nuggets in McDonaldland history is perhaps the most sorrowful of them all. Originating in the higher ridges of the island, the nuggets were found by McDonald and Co. while on a retreat to the island's natural honey mustard springs.

Oval in shape and only several inches tall, the self-aware and intelligent nuggets were almost immediately enslaved by McDonald for cleaning and service purposes in the capital city.

They were excellent at their tasks, but the nuggets' harmless demeanor and appearance fostered sympathy among the ruling class, most notably McCheese, who uttered the famous words, "Set my nuggets free!"

Not about to let McCheese upstage him, McDonald made an unsurpassed gesture of kindness, going so far as to set up a land of barbecue sauce and sweet 'n' sour for the nuggets to rule on their own.

Unbeknownst to all, however, the utopia he had created for these folk was not a paradise; it was merely the discovery of a niche market. For McDonald knew what other did not: These nuggets tasted like chicken.

The land he created for the freed slave class was merely a giant breeding factory. The nuggets leaving the island on their ship to freedom landed in a slaughterhouse which bred the creatures, then sealed the offspring in plastic and shipped them for worldwide consumption. So indeed, the nuggets are now bathing in an endless spring of barbecue sauce, but only as a condiment to their ruthless consumption by humans worldwide.

There are only a handful of nuggets remaining on the isle, those who chose to stay and serve the upper classes.[20]

The Ugly Conclusion

Despite the fact that the country has only one major industry, the island of McDonaldland is extremely prosperous.

But shrewd marketing and delicious food is only a mouthwatering facade covering the exploitation of a large underclass to the benefit of few.

Only through publicity and recognition of the problems faced by the people of McDonaldland do the suffering masses have a chance at the freedom they so richly deserve, but the wily plans of Ronald McDonald leave no such opportunity for the exploited peasant classes.

It seems that this oppression will continue as long as somebody says, "McDonald's."

H

12Except with *much* higher cholesterol and a life expectancy of about 30 years, which typically ends with a *major* coronary episode. Greasy.

13There is no real manual for the labor they do; it's just a strange term.

14If anybody can think of a synonym for "robbery" that begins with a "d," please replace "robbery" with it and read the sentence over. It will roll off the tongue delightfully.

15Nobody actually has seen the Hamburglar pull off one of his rip-offs, and come to think of it, they say individual servers interviewed have never actually been given any food by the Hamburgler. And another thing! How come Hamburgler doesn't look like any of the peasants? There something fishy there.

16Their bodies are made up of a muscular mass which resemble poor imitations of spareribs. A great delicacy in the palace.

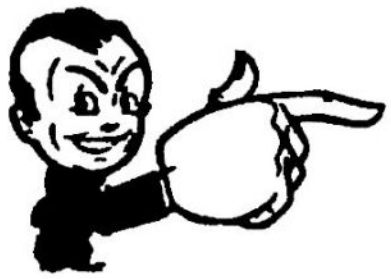
17Salt isn't native to the island, and is given out for good work. Those who don't work well enough die of hydration.

18I never saw him again. Great big tasty fries and ribs at the palace that night, though. A little dry, but good.

19This strange headline was seen on the front page of the Palau Islander, however: "Huge magical fries with sparerib bodies delivered by the gods during worst famine in history." Studies of this incident show no connection. Never mind.

20Apparently the nuggets remaining have no idea of the fate of their kin. A maid in McDonald's mansion was reported as saying, "I just got a letter from my nephew Frankie. He's doing quite well from himself.

He said he was the hit of the restaurant grand opening in Moscow."



Mr. Big Hand

The Book of Zines

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By Tony Shanks

As the founder and pop mastermind behind The High Llamas, Sean O'Hagan has been mining sounds of the past – from The Beach Boys to Burt Bacharach – to help create the sound for tomorrow. From recent Llama albums like *Hawaii* and *Cold and Bouncy* (both on V2) to side projects such as the *Turn On* album with Stereolab cohort Tim Gane, O'Hagan remains one of the most creative forces in music today.

Several months ago, HITCH spoke with O'Hagan about his work with the Llamas and what lies beyond.

HITCH: Are you working on another Turn On album with Tim Gane right now?

O'Hagan: Yeah, we're in the process of starting new tracks.

HITCH: Is it going to be mostly non-vocal stuff like the last album?

O'Hagan: At this stage, we don't know, because we're in the early days of the tracks. When we can grab time to figure out the tracks, that's what we'll do. Actually, I would say there will probably be arranged vocals. On the last album we had a couple of traditional, back-up vocal kind of things, but this time, I think we might try to do some cluster-arranged sort of harmony thing, which Tim and myself are fond of.

HITCH: I wanted to talk about your fondness for the '60s, early-'70s orchestral pop. It seems to kind of a movement. Where do you think it's going? Has it already reached it peak or do you think it will continue?

O'Hagan: I actually don't really like thinking about it in that way, because when you think about things in those terms, you immediately limit them and contextualize them far too radically. I think the secret is an innate kind of specialness and the groupings are usually accidents, rather than intentional. The orchestral pop thing was American – Beach Boys, Left Banke, that sort of thing. What interests me most about orchestral pop now is basically Brazilian pop music. In that music, I've found a whole new set of harmony rules, which I find devastatingly attractive. I would like to see orchestral pop address that whole kind of movement, if it's going to go anywhere.

HITCH: The first album I picked up was *Gideon Gaye*, which I really got into because I'm a big Brian Wilson fan, Burt Bacharach fan and Steely Dan fan. Then I went back and listened to your old Microdisney stuff and then your solo album. It seems like there's a constant, changing progression from one to the other. Where does all the electronic stuff come into it? Like the stuff you did for Pizzicato Five, Stereolab and Cornelius?

O'Hagan: If you listened to that first album I made, which was really a kind of classic record, I was playing with the idea of developed harmony and cutting up tapes. So they were sort of listening on one hand to Brian Wilson, or they could have been listening to Dion and the Belmonts or Leonard Bernstein, and on the other hand, Stockhausen and whatever. There's always been a history of people who are interested in interesting harmony. But their interest in interesting harmony doesn't stop with unusual harmony; they're interested in ideas. Once you've got the harmony thing down, you look to the sonics – the other gray area of music. Music is very split in those two very strict traditions, and I don't think they necessarily need to be split; they can complement each other, you can fuse the two ideas. I don't like the idea of totally faithful or over respective of all the traditions; I do think you have to play with the tradition and change or filter it. You have to bring a little bit of yourself and your own interests into it. I do believe we've got a duty to move things along or move things sideways, and fulfill that obligation.

HITCH: It seems to me you're someone who is more of an arranger and composer, rather than someone interested in just putting out albums.

O'Hagan: I'm interested in the idea of arranging music – sound, really. The whole way we can see how sound affects us, our moods, how it affects our environment and the immediate space around you. That moment you react to the immediate space – that reaction can be kicked off by a bunch of chords, a voice, a good instrument. That's what I love – the chemical reaction that happens in your stomach when you hear chord changes. That's what I'm interested in. I certainly don't see myself as, you know, the guitar player in a band, or the piano player or the lead singer. I find it funny that, at the end of the second millennium, so many people still do think like that. Record companies still hold on to that way of marketing music. So many bands form and go into a recording studio and put down the drums and then the guitar and so on – that's almost like reinventing the wheel over and over again. That way of working doesn't interest me.

HITCH: I've read that you've been interested in scoring movies.

O'Hagan: Yes, I'd be interested very much, but it doesn't seem to have happened yet. Someday.

HITCH: What type of film would you do? What are some of your favorite scores?

O'Hagan: *Light Sleeper* – I would've loved to have done that film. I'm not going to say the obvious things like *Get Carter* or that kind of kitsch. There's some good films around, but Paul Schrader's *Light Sleeper* is totally up my street. I guess I've got more Ennio Morricone records than any other artist. *A Man and a Woman* by Francis Lai is also good.

HITCH: What are you working on?

O'Hagan: I've got a bunch of remixes.

(continued on pg. 66)

I'd Like to Teach the World to Sing

Ever get a song stuck in your head that *just won't* leave you alone? Catch yourself singing choruses of tunes you really can't stand? Find some wretchedly evil melody violently thwarting all attempts made to fall asleep?

Friend, I understand. You are not alone.

In the locker room of the YMCA, for example, there I was, fresh from an excellent treadmill experience (and is there any other kind?), enjoying small talk with my fellow naked compatriots, when what comes a-hummin' down the stairwell but a thumbheaded rendition of Frampton's frightfest: *"Do you ... you? Feel like I do? Do you – YOU?"*[1]

Or how about the time at Schlotzsky's Deli when the workers jammed out to some *"Who? Were? You think-in-a-bout?"* thing for at least five repetitions? Or the day I made the mistake of listening to the Spice Girls[2] ("Hmmm ... I wonder what all the brouhaha about this is about?") at Borders and had *"I'll tell you what I want, what I really really want"*[3] caught in my memory's auto-repeat mode for the remainder of the evening?

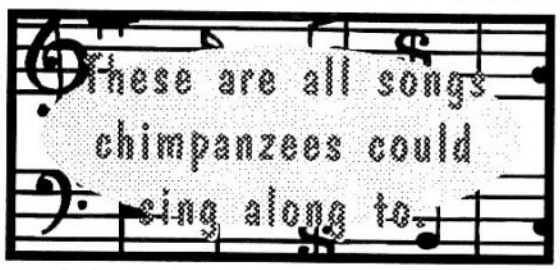
My wife's fluctuations between whistlings of the James Gang and the *Sanford and Son* theme?[4] And what about all those mentally entrenched hits from the Reagan years? Singalong songs all.

And it is precisely this singalongability which, sadly, makes a pop tune a hit and grants it a half-life of 50,000 years through telemarketed K-Tel® compilations which undoubtedly light the discos in Hell afire. With singalongability, a mediocre singer is transformed from a street-corner-whiner into an ozone-destroying Ottwawan, a junkie Pacific Rimmer becomes a role model for freaks worldwide and a group of Brooklyn white guys becomes the most popular rap act yet.[5]

Don't believe me? Why not go ahead and singalong: *"It's like rayee-ain on your wedding day!"*; *"With the lights out, it's dang'rous! Here we are now – entertain us!"*; *"You gotta fight* (blam blam) */ For your right* (blam blam) */ to PARRRTY!"*[6]

You say you don't enjoy country & western, but who *can't* remember the tune to those friends in low places, where the whiskey drowns and the beer chases? You may be as racist as the average Idaho skinhead, but you still know that ebony and ivory live together in perfect harmony, don't ya? You've never been to Australia, but you know it's a land down under, eh? Of course you do[7] (unless you've been living under a rock for a couple of decade).

And why? Well, yes, because the recording industry forced those things upon you with all its might, but more importantly, it's because these are all songs chimpanzees could sing along to.



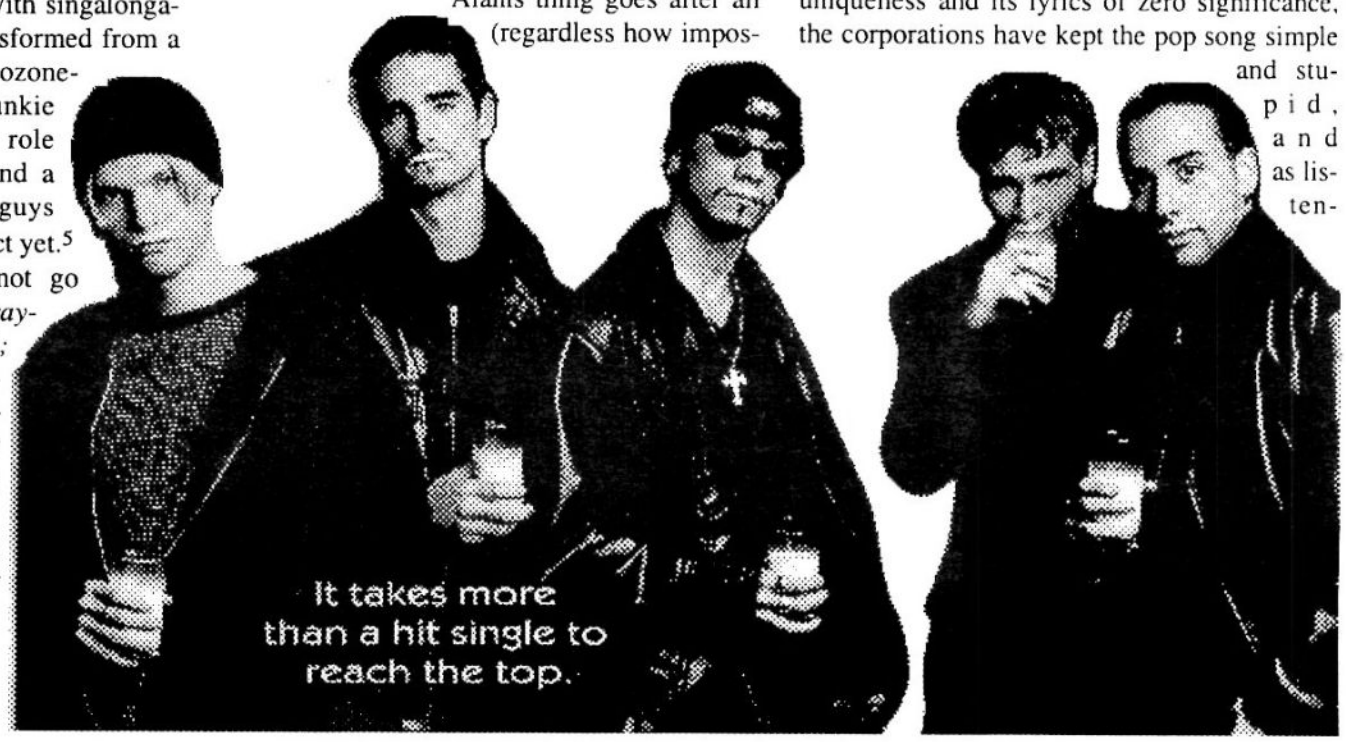
Driving them into the ground with continuous airplay makes the situation all the more intolerable. But hey, it's become clear that radio is not really designed for your listening pleasure. It's more like an unending advertisement, blatantly for products you don't need and more nefariously for recordings you don't like. There's been too much dough invested in the latest MTV wunderkind for sales *not* to happen, and the quality of the music has strikingly little to do with anything. As long as it's a singalong song, it'll sell; the overexposure, the glowing reviews, the sex, leather pants – these are just fallbacks in case the audience really can't remember how that Alanis thing goes after all (regardless how impossible that may seem).[8]

Can't you just picture Spinal Tap's manager howling about "cramming it right down their throats"? It's Col. Parker all the way to the bank, party people.

I'm talking about what really matters to the David Geffens here, those Manhattan high-rise recording companies managed by Jabbas of Huts. I'm talking about the bottom line, and no, that ain't no microbrewery. The cash. The green. The "shitloads of money" – this is the cynical CEO's yardstick with which to measure musical success.

I mean, let's face it – popular music is made to be exactly that: *popular*. It isn't manufactured to achieve any true artistic ends or to stretch any arbitrary musical boundaries – that's a hopeless activity better left to the starving university degree-holders. It is pressed to sell and sell quickly, a mindset spawning both the play-it-until-it's-worn-out DJ philosophy and the mind-numbing quality of the tunes. The popular market doesn't *want* to be challenged. It doesn't wish to be asked to think or make aesthetic decisions. It only needs to be told, by the Wonderful Wizard of MTV, what is good, and The Wiz is all too willing to respond with an offering beyond debate – an endless, infinite stream of singalongsongs.

With its catchy melodies of cookie-cut uniqueness and its lyrics of zero significance, the corporations have kept the pop song simple and stupid, and as listen-



Queer? Not us!
But check out this
radical milk ad we did!

Something Else Entirely

By Joe Rogers

ers, so have our tastes. Overexposure to mediocrity somehow changes its status from inane to acceptable, and our CD collections (not to mention our fossilized records and tapes) spill from their never-big-enough containers. All that stuff we no longer want to hear – those recordings the used record store won't even take[9] – rests in our closets and basements and attics, safely hidden from friends who'd be more than eager to harass us for actually owning the shit.

I mean, when was the last time *anybody* dug out that *Thriller* LP and reveled in its glory? What about that embarrassing Fleetwood Mac? That flaccid Steely Dan? But still, who among us still has the choruses of "Beat It," "You Make Lovin' Fun" and "Rikki, Don't Lose That Number" ingrained in long-term memory? Ashamed yet? Try the Bee Gees' "Stayin' Alive," ABBA's "Dancing Queen" and Cyndi Lauper's "Girls Just Wanna Have Fun" on for size.

Skip ahead to the present, when we're all too quick to turn up our noses to *Casey Kasem's Top 40 Musical Commodities*. For while we can proudly refuse to get jiggy wit' the Backstreet Boys, we've still got our Sheryl Crow, our Oasis, our Green Day. We still experience a fair share of corporate misguidance in spite of our smug cynicism and continue falling into patterns of gullibility and manipulation.

Like so many followers of 12-step recovery programs, we've only managed repeated substitution of one dependency for another. From buttrock to disco, from Britpop to Seattle grunge, we're still unable to shake the instant gratification of a singalong song. H

The Spice Girls do so enjoy laughing at those whom they have suckered.

[1]The stadium-pleasin' "Do You Feel Like I Do?"

[2]For details on how to own your very own Spice Girl, see "Spice Girl Tamagotchi," HITCH 16.

[3]"Wannabe."

[4]Written by Quincy Jones. Really!

[5]Aw, Ma, you're just jealous. It's the Beastie Boys.

[6]Alanis, Nirvana, Beasties – in that order.

[7]Thanks to Garth Brooks, the bang-up team of Paul McCartney & Stevie Wonder and Men at Work.

[8]For more on Alanis Morrisette, see sidebar at right.

[9]Like, say, Hootie and the Blowfish's *Cracked Rear View*.

The HITCH Remix Project

Thank U for Nothing

If there is one current song we wish people would *stop* singing, it's Alanis Morrisette's execrable "Thank U." For one thing, it sucks. For another, it makes no damn sense! The things she thanks and discusses have no real bearing on the poor girl's life! It reads like the poetry of someone who thinks she's, like, *really* deep.

So let's change that. Below left is a sampling of the wretched song, both verses and chorus. Replace any of the phrases with the "How Abouts" and "Thank Yous" in the columns at right. *Voila!* Now Alanis can really relate. Isn't it ironic? Don't ya think?

—*Rod Lott*

ACTUAL SONG

How about getting off of these antibiotics
How about stopping eating when I'm filled up
How about them transparent dangling carrots
How about that ever-elusive kudo

Thank you India
Thank you terror
Thank you disillusionment
Thank you frailty
Thank you consequence
Thank you thank you silence

HOW ABOUTS

writing something that makes sense
putting your clothes back on
going back to Nickelodeon
pulling a Kurt Cobain
releasing only 8-tracks
dropping this India bullshit

THANK YOUS

Winchell's
Monistat
bottle of Nair
kids with allowances
poor taste
Supertramp

él capitan: the cotton candy world of mike alway

By Rod Lott

In a world of music flooded with cute-boy groups, where the Teletubbies can top the charts and in which radio overplay a new song in a matter of days, there are a lot of advantages to flying under the radar.

Perhaps no one has caught on or is as comfortable with it that British record producer Mike Alway. Regarded as a musical genius in countries other than our own, the 42-year-young Alway is a bonafide slave to that rare perfect pop melody, and has spent years trying to put such harmonies onto record – first as the head of the well-regarded and influential labels Él, Cherry Red and Blanco y Negro (home to Everything but the Girl), and now as the captain of the ship known as if..., whose inaugural release, *Songs for the Jet Set*, made quite the waves in the world of pop.

Alway's approach to the musicmaking process is unconventional, original and – when you think about it – downright simple ... just like Alway himself, a man so unassuming and removed from the egotism that runs rampant in his industry, he not only writes in lowercase, he seems to *speak* in lowercase.

Now with a batch of new releases further shaking up those who "get it" – among them, a sequel to *Jet Set* and an exercise in kiddie psychedelia entitled *Algebra Spaghetti* – Alway agreed to talk to **HITCH** about the methods behind his vision. I was to call him on a Sunday – 10 a.m. my time, 4 p.m. his.

Alway: Now *that's* punctual. I didn't make any notes; it's always better to go off-the-cuff.

HITCH: Let's start with *Algebra Spaghetti*. Tell me a little about the idea.

Alway: Without hearing "Lidsville," there would be no Reverie.[1] I was always very, very aware of shows life *H.R. Pufnstuf*. I just thought that with my interest with the lighter end of psychedelia and in melody and creating artificial records by groups that don't exist, that Sid & Marty Krofft were perfect for this. My wife reintroduced them to me, and I felt like building a side label to if... to release it. I didn't want to confuse people; if if... represents the relative adultness and sophistication of *Songs for the Jet Set*, then Reverie was going to be the other side. There were other things like *Singing Ringing Tree*, which was an enchanting, Eastern European program in the late '60s involving a fairy, a witch and a big fish – similar to things like *Pufnstuf* – but this sort of *strangeness* that comes from children's lore borders quite literally on psychedelia, and I was interested to see all this could be encouraged into a genre. But to be honest, I think *Algebra Spaghetti* is the weakest record I've made in a long time. It's worth the price of admission for the good stuff. It's a classic example of the sleeve convincing the consumer that it's a better record than it actually is.

HITCH: Well, it worked for me.

Alway: Me, too. There will be a sequel, probably in early summer, but that really will be a proper template. *Algebra Spaghetti* is by no means a coherent template. The funny thing is making that record, the relative success of *Songs for the Jet Set: Volume 2* and, to a lesser degree, the Loveletter record,[2] were borne out of the mistakes made with *Algebra Spaghetti*.

HITCH: Tell me about this approach you take of making up a band's name and sound first and then finding personnel to fulfill that. Why create fictitious bands?

Alway: In my experience, I've not enjoyed working with real groups. Él Records initially was borne out of my disastrous experience with Blanco y Negro. I'm just the type of person who likes to lead the situation and be the captain of the team. I'm not the type of guy, like a lot of people in the music business, to tag along just to be part of the whole fucking setup. I think that what happens when you get money is that real groups, once they know you have money, their attitude changes from "What are we going to do together?" to "What are you going to tell me to do?" So I was certainly given the option to become their chauffeur, but it was one I was really very pleased to decline. It was an altogether unpleasant experience; I found it took all my energy, it was disconcerting, it was expensive, just basically to tell people what they wanted to hear.

HITCH: How then did you make the bridge to Él?

Alway: Él was a really good, really progressive, independent label by the standards of 1985 and '86. That was when I decided to go into a different kind of style, when the characterizations were made up. All that means is, there were real people being signed, and I would sit down with the artist and say, "Let's create this character; it's based on you anyway, so we're going to accentuate certain attractive facets of your personality. We're not going to have any gigs, and we're going to create these visual images and the rest of it, and it's going to be a lot of fun and very linear." And because it was very linear, I was able to do things like release records in tight continuity, like in batches – four 10"s, three 7"s, four 12"s – simultaneously. That's how they were released – three albums together, four albums together – so there were actually only about four designated release dates for the year. That's the way the press took it, too. They didn't review the recordings as much as did what we were doing with the label. The difference with Él Records was that it was intelligent music for intelligent people. Very eclectic stuff, deliberately disorienting. I deliberately put out bad records in order to infuriate people, like records that were in Latin or French or whatever. I wanted to make a statement with Él – my statement about my disappointment with the music industry and Blanco – and we had a fantastic time. It was just my way of being able to make an anti-careerist statement.

Songs for the Jet Set

(Jet Set)

There's not a lot I haven't said about this out-and-out masterpiece that I didn't already when it was spotlighted in HITCH 17. Suffice to say, my feelings about it remain unchanged. This stands as *the* best album of 1997, and nestles comfortably in my all-time top 10, in no immediate danger of slipping off. If you don't own it, you're not my friend.

HITCH: And then how did you make the transition to your own label, if...?[3]

Alway: Because at the end of Él, I was enjoying myself so much and we were getting received, even though I was trying to make the records as unattractive as possible, even making bad records on purpose. I realized somehow, we were hitting the right nerves with people.

HITCH: Was *Songs for the Jet Set* the first if... release?

Alway: It was.

HITCH: Tell me you were making a good record there or I'm going to be disappointed.

Alway: It was, although it's not a real record! It's a fake record and, I think, the definitive Él record. All it was was that Él Records was not selling enough records in 1989. I did nothing for eight years that had anything to do with the music industry. So then I decided that times had changed, and I was encouraged to do that again. *Songs for the Jet Set* was really what might have occurred the day after Él finished. It's a very smooth transition, in my opinion – all the same jokes, all the same performers, very much the same types of musical styles, because those are things that are my particular signatures. It's not that I've only got very few ideas, it's just they're the only ideas I've got that are any good.

HITCH: What are you trying to say with if...?

Alway: It's very anti-careerist and unegotistical. What I want to do is create fantastic groups that don't exist and release brilliant records that come out of nowhere and may or may not go to the very top of the charts. It's not important that they do or imperative that they don't. It's like it was in the '60s when there was one medium, which was the record. Nobody did videos, nobody did 12" versions, nobody did remixes – the record *was* definitive. The record *should be* definitive. Because I'm limited financially, I'm aware that I can't achieve much. But what I can achieve is notoriety. I can make a living at that level. That's a great position to be in: I make a living for me and my wife, I make a living to keep all these people happy, we're all having a lot of fun, we put out beautifully designed records that ultimately many thousands of people will buy, and we don't have any majors telling us what to do. But we're not part of the indie scene, either. I like organization, I like professionalism, I like having labels in all parts of the world, but I have total freedom. In the '80s when I was doing Él, there was no audience in America for what we're doing know. But that's all changed with things like lounge, Beck and Combustible Edison.

HITCH: How much do you think you have contributed to the resurgence of lounge, and where do see that heading?

Alway: Not very much. What I've contributed most, I think, is non-musical. I think I contributed typefaces. I mean, I'm amazed that groups like Pizzicato Five claim *not* to have been influenced by Él Records. But I'm not being rude about it, because without the Japanese, there would have been no Él Records at all.

HITCH: Why do you think your records are so well-received in places like Japan and Spain?

Alway: It's very much just a way of their

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[1]Reverie is the label specially created for the release of *Algebra Spaghetti*.

[2]Loveletter, which did wonders with the *Barbarella* theme on the first *Jet Set* album, released its debut LP, *Beethoven Chopin Kitchen Fraud*, on Valentine's Day of this year.

[3]if... is named after the 1969 Lindsay Anderson film of the same name, of which Alway says, "Though the subject is very English, it's Anderson's most stylish, best looking film and also his most sharp. Malcolm McDowell is at the absolute height of his powers and the final 10 minutes are breathtaking and stunningly original. You will easily identify with the fact that *If...* has far more to do with my work than any *Austin Powers*. There's no comparison."

culture and the way people are educated. Not that they're *more* educated, just in different ways. They're more open. In England, the press still thinks I'm trying to pull a joke on them, but I'm not. I mean, nobody can love pop music more than me. I'm not interested in being part of the lounge scene or making money beyond living – I just want my freedom, the freedom to do my art. And that's "art" in very small letters. It's the honest truth that *not one* Él record was *ever* played on English radio, which, when you consider the competition at the time, is a crime.

HITCH: What was the basic concept behind the first *Songs for the Jet Set*?

Alway: It wasn't any bold statement, and I don't think it all works.

HITCH: I'm curious, what do you think doesn't work on that album?

Alway: I think the Viva Maria tracks don't work and I don't think the closing Wallpaper track is appropriate. And I don't think I would've done "Kites Are Fun."[4] I don't think you can do something like that when the original is as good as it is. But I was unsure, and these records cost a lot of money. When I'm putting these records together, I read books on Orson Welles[5] to give me courage, because I'm not terribly rich, obviously. Funding them is like putting a pizza together – some from Japan, some from Sweden, some from private sources – but that makes it more enjoyable as well.

HITCH: Are you more satisfied with *Volume 2*?

Alway: Yes, I am. There are things on Volume 1 which are think are fantastic; I'm not saying *Volume 2* is better in every way. Overall, though, I like the warmer sound. It's more spontaneous.[6] I had every reason to believe the album was going to be a complete disaster. I like "La De La," though I don't think it's as good as "The Emperor of Oranges." I don't care that there are a lot of covers, because they're all so obscure and they're all great songs.

HITCH: Except for "These Boots Are Made for Walking."

Alway: I would not have put that song on there, but I like Shazna's really ebullient performance. The original is overrated – obviously, it's a classic in its own time – but passé. I suspect if the British press get a hold of it, that's the one thing they'll bitch about. Then they'll complain there are too many instrumentals, that there's a fake youth group and a fake psychedelic group and a fake group that sounds like The Fifth Dimension and a fake acid group. "Are we being taken for a ride?"

HITCH: This one seems to have a harder edge than the first one.

Alway: That's not necessarily something I set out to do, but I understand what you mean. But there are areas of lightness as well. I think they make very interesting companion records. I'm already at work on *Volume 3* and I know what songs are going to be on there. But should it be lighter? I think it should. I'd like to make the record much more vocal. I found that while making this one, I wanted the producers to do less. If the performances are there, you don't *need* all the orchestrations.

HITCH: What sort of things influence your work as you put these records together?

Alway: I think the overall structure is certainly influenced by top soundtracks, in their classic form. My favorite soundtracks are *Bedazzled* and *Rosemary's Baby*. I'm not really into cold, chintzy spy themes and that sort of thing. Someone in the English press said that *Songs for the Jet Set* would have made a great

Algebra Spaghetti

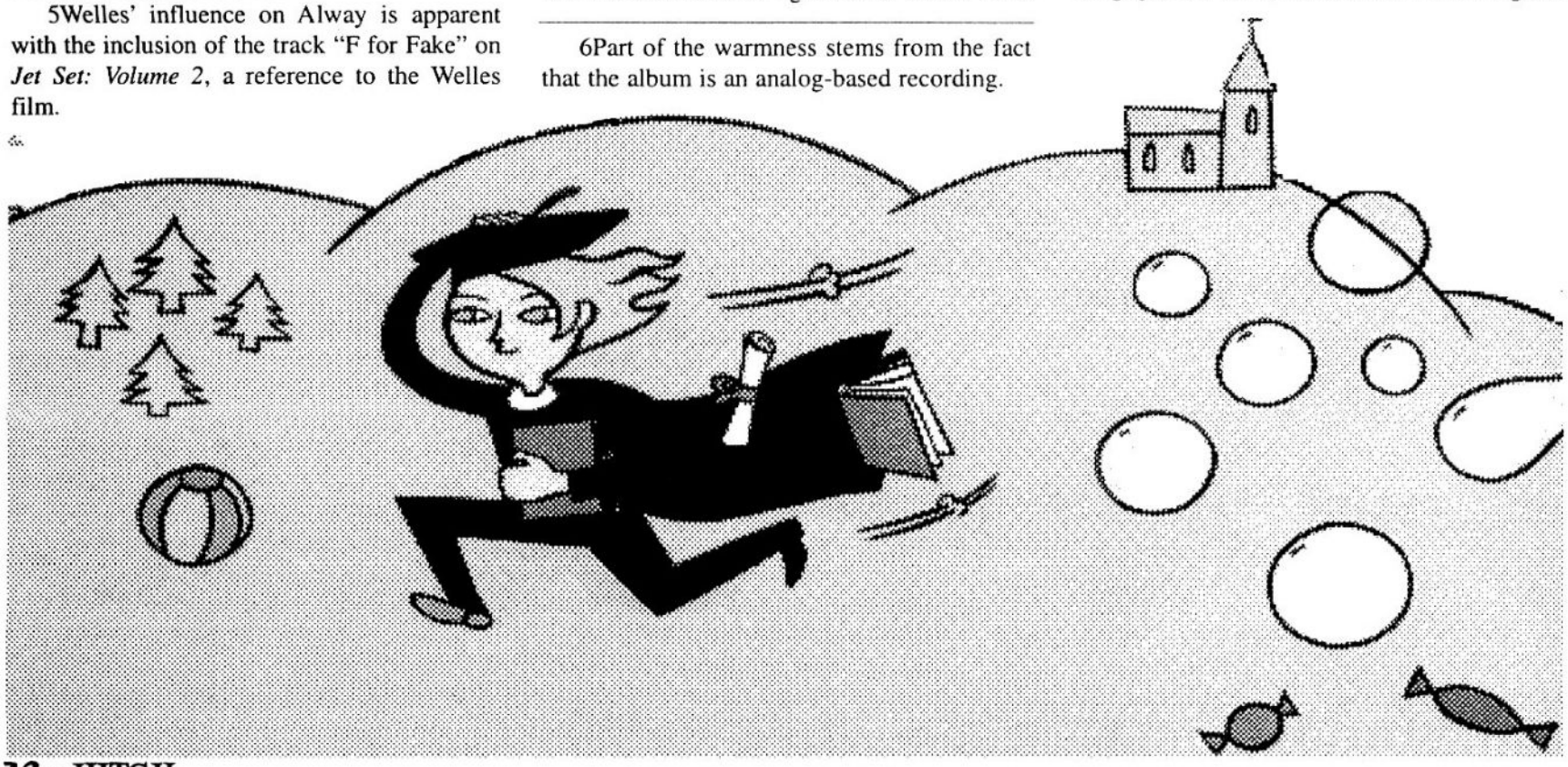
(Siesta)

As a kid, do you remember Mom coming home from Woolworth's, bringing you generic compilation records on budget labels like Pickwick or Peter Pan, containing enigmatic bands performing songs that sounded so squeaky-clean on the surface, yet harbored a great deal of mischief underneath? That subversive spirit is recaptured perfectly on this "children's fantasypop" exercise. It opens with the sparkling and bubbly instrumental "Mild Euphoria," obviously some child's idea of a caffeinated daybreak, followed by a SPF-to-the-max rendering of "Sunshine Day," made famous by *The Brady Bunch*. Monday Sinclair's cover of the 1910 Fruitgum Co.'s "1910 Cotton Candy Castle" has been deemed by Alway himself as "the greatest pop performance I have ever had the privilege to be associated with," so who's to argue? Other wonderfully bizarre, sugar-coated covers arrive with "Marnie" (from the Hitchcock thriller), "Different" (from *H.R. Pufnstuf*), the British kiddie TV classic "Rupert the Bear" and the Lemon Piper track "Jelly Jungle of Orange Marmalade." Among the originals, "Mandalay Cow" from Maria Napoleon is a surreally playful singalong, while Today's Pop Symphony's "Toytown Cocktail Jazz" offers a wind-down before afternoon naptime. The entire affair swirls back at you in a hallucinatory rush with a "slight return" of "Cotton Candy Castle," leaving you utterly and melodically dazed. A killer concept, seen to perfect fruition.

4Tomorrow's World's "Kites Are Fun" was a cover of '60s light-pop outfit The Free Design's biggest and best hit.

5Welles' influence on Alway is apparent with the inclusion of the track "F for Fake" on *Jet Set: Volume 2*, a reference to the Welles film.

6Part of the warmness stems from the fact that the album is an analog-based recording.



soundtrack for *Austin Powers*, but it wouldn't. It's got nothing to do with *Austin Powers* or purple velvet or anything like that. It has nothing to do with buying all the right clothes and listening to all the right records and going to all the right clubs. When I look at the '60s – and to some extent, the '70s – I see records that were made artistically, particularly soundtracks. It wasn't a contrived thing for the lowest common denominator. I'm trying to make records that assume the public has some intelligence – and it does; there's enough of them out there. We don't need the ones that don't anyway! There is some sort of reward there, if people inquire.

HITCH: Who are some of the film composers that you are into?

Alway: Dudley Moore, for sure, but only for a short period of time – '67-'68. There are things about Henry Mancini that I certainly enjoy – some things more than others. I love his soundtrack to *Arabesque*, for instance. It's not so much that I'm into one particular composer as much as it is certain soundtracks. I mean, I like the lighter side of orchestral music anyway, where there's melody. A lot of these film people were actually quite valid classical composers, and they've been cast out of this severely arrogant and elitist classical world. And the reason is, because they're light. It's the same with pop music and films. If something is intense, depressing or heavyweight, it's considered to have artistic merit. If it's light, it is not.

HITCH: That reminds me of Burt Bacharach's situation, who was always regarded as kitschy, but now is seen today as a serious composer.

Alway: I know that the lounge people brought all those associations into play with Bacharach, but nobody ever thought Bacharach is anything but a composer of the highest merit. He *is* the sound of the '60s, as is Scott Walker and to some extent, Jackie Trent and the Tony Hatch sound. The American side, though, is no less marvelous. There were some great things of that era and I love Strawberry Alarm Clock and Electric Prunes, but I was never interested in the Jefferson Airplanes. I don't like the scuzziness and degenerate side of real drug psychedelia. But what interests me is Hollywood's interpretation of psychedelia, as represented in something like *I Love You, Alice B. Toklas* – the sanitized version. Fantastic! Much better than it ever really was.

HITCH: Don't forget *The Party*.

Alway: Exactly. Nobody ever had parties like that! Instead, they were sitting around in their own filth, smoking drugs! There was never anything that glamorous. But Claudine Longet has become kind of the embodiment of that whole thing. I'm not impressed with much of her albums – they're more of a better idea than execution. Kind of like an Él record.

HITCH: Jumping to today, whose music – if any – do you admire?

The Ruling Class
The Very Best of Él Records
(Él/Cherry Red)

A testament to the legacy of the legendary label Él, *The Ruling Class* fronts 24 of its greatest hits – a task that no doubt proved most difficult. Marden Hill sets the appropriate mood with a sunny slice of pop heaven (and returns to help finish things off with a whip-smart tribute to Ennio Morricone). To get a sense of the ironic heights at work here, look no further than Would Be Goods' "The Camera Loves Me," in which our naive narrator purrs, *"Another drink and I'm yours for sure / I've never taken a picture like this before!"* Lo-fi funk reigns supreme with the bargain-basement pleasures of "Discotheque," delivered straight-face by Bad Dream Fancy Dress. The second disc is an enlightening interview/conversation between Alway and two other Él associates that reveals the fanatical love and care that went into the making of these songs, and the fondness with which they are remembered today.

Alway: I admire Stereolab. They're nice people and the best people around. Just the way they've come from nothing and continue to build, and they get everything their own way and they're happy to make their own mistakes. They care about *everything*. The quality is their watchword. It's very difficult to do these things without compromise; you've got to pay the rent, too, so I admire them for that. I think Broadcast would a good fit for their label. Otherwise – and I don't want you to take this wrong – I try to make it a point to not listen to any new music, because it's just such a difficult influence on you. If you hear something that impresses you, it destroys your confidence. I don't want to be disconcerted. But if anybody is putting out a better record than "Lidsville" this year, I'll be very surprised. I wish I could give you a great list of bands, but I can't. I mean, Kahimi Karie – I love her to death, but her records are terrible.

HITCH: Why doesn't your name show up on any of your records? Why do you keep such a low profile?

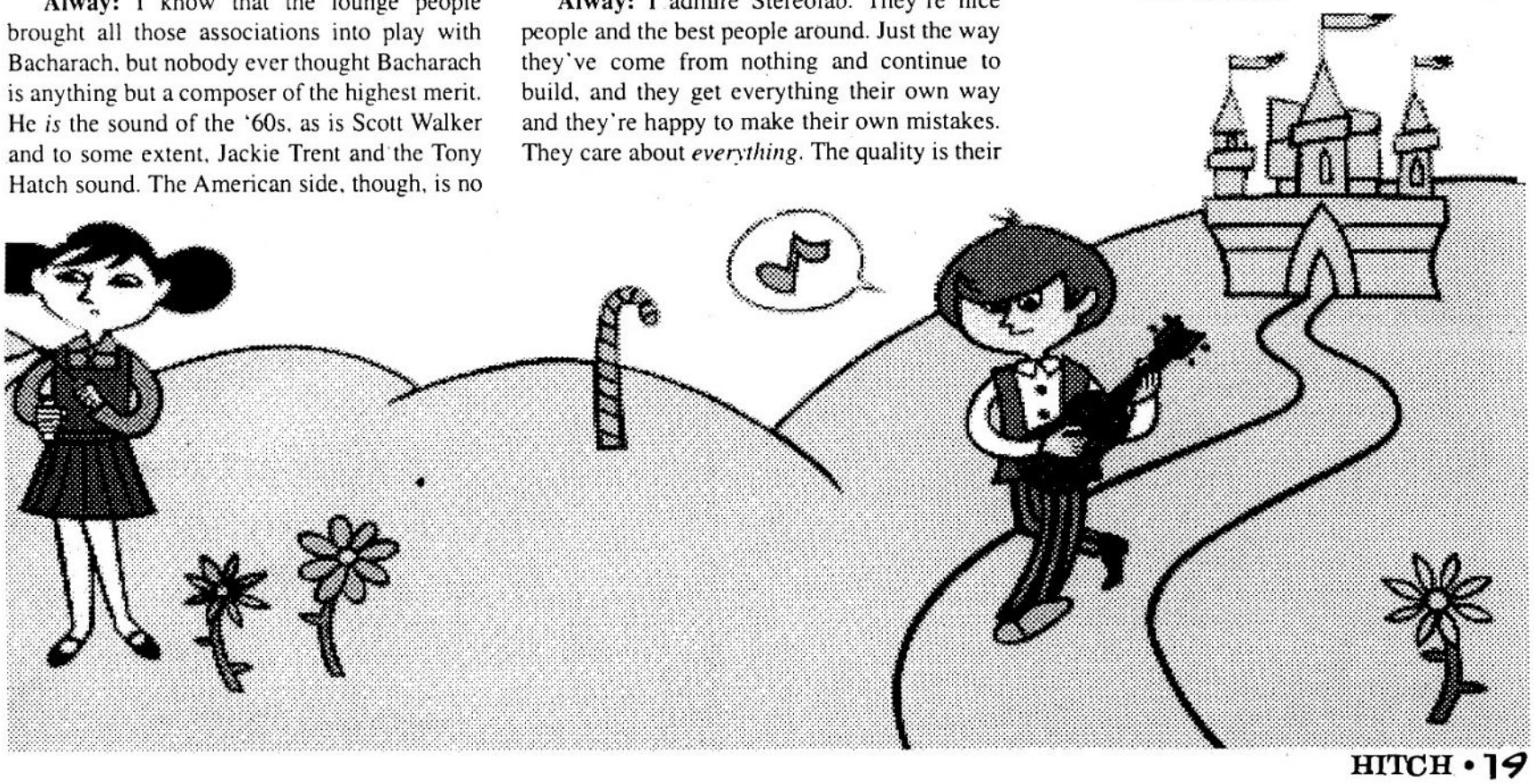
Alway: Because there's no way I can advertise myself. At the moment, my wife is putting together a website about my work, but I'm very much in two minds about it. Of course, I want people to get more information and have more contacts, but I just want people to come to it without any sort of influence. Why do they need to know it was put together by me? If they inquire, they'll find out soon enough. I love working with the musicians, but the accent should not be on me.

HITCH: So what's next?

Alway: I'm making Death by Chocolate and Milky[7] albums, for sure. I'm putting together the money for those now. Wallpaper will make an album that will be very much structured like *In Like Flint* – ever

(continued on pg. 66)

[7]Both acts are represented on *Jet Set: Volume 2*.



IN THE NEXT SERIES:

#5 Christopher McDonald (Dad)
#6 Director Franco Amurri
#7 Dodger Goes Loco!
#8 Swiping a Chiquita
#9 Dodger Foils the Bad Guys
#10 Gypsy & Dodger Together Again!

DON'T MONKEY AROUND!
BE THE FIRST ON YOUR BLOCK WITH THE COMPLETE SET!

2 THORA BIRCH

Lil' Thora plays Eva, the girl who finds the rascally monkey! She names him Dodger, because he is *sooo* silly! The monkey picks pockets!

BEST LINE: "Dodger, you're my bestest friend in the whole wide world!"

FUN FACT: Despite her last name, Thora is not really made of tree bark!

1 HARVEY KEITEL

Harvey plays a silly Gypsy, but not as silly as his pet capuchin monkey, a mischievious lil' scamp who runs away from him! The monkey picks pockets!

BEST LINE: "You see monkey?"

FUN FACT: In real life, Harvey's teeth are not really greasy!

4 MIMI ROGERS

Mimi plays Thora's mother, but doesn't know about her daughter's monkey! Mimi is not silly, but oh, boy, her daughter's monkey sure is! He picks pockets!

BEST LINE: "Eva, have you been eating all the bananas?"

STARTLING COINCEDENCE: Mimi appeared naked in *Playboy*! Dodger is naked the whole way through *Monkey Trouble*!

3 DODGER

Dodger is the silly monkey who causes all the trouble (lots!) and picks pockets! He sure is cute, but watch out, too, because he's a silly trickster!

BEST LINE: None. Monkeys can't talk!

FUN FACT: Another silly monkey movie is *Going Ape* with Tony Danza!

SAFETY TIP: Monkeys bite! Don't touch!!!

So You Wanna Be a Greek?

By Randy Hyden

What is it that makes a greek man such an incredibly cool collegiate stud? Like that old Pepsi commercial said, it's not the clothes you wear and it's not what you drink. The truth is, it's your name!

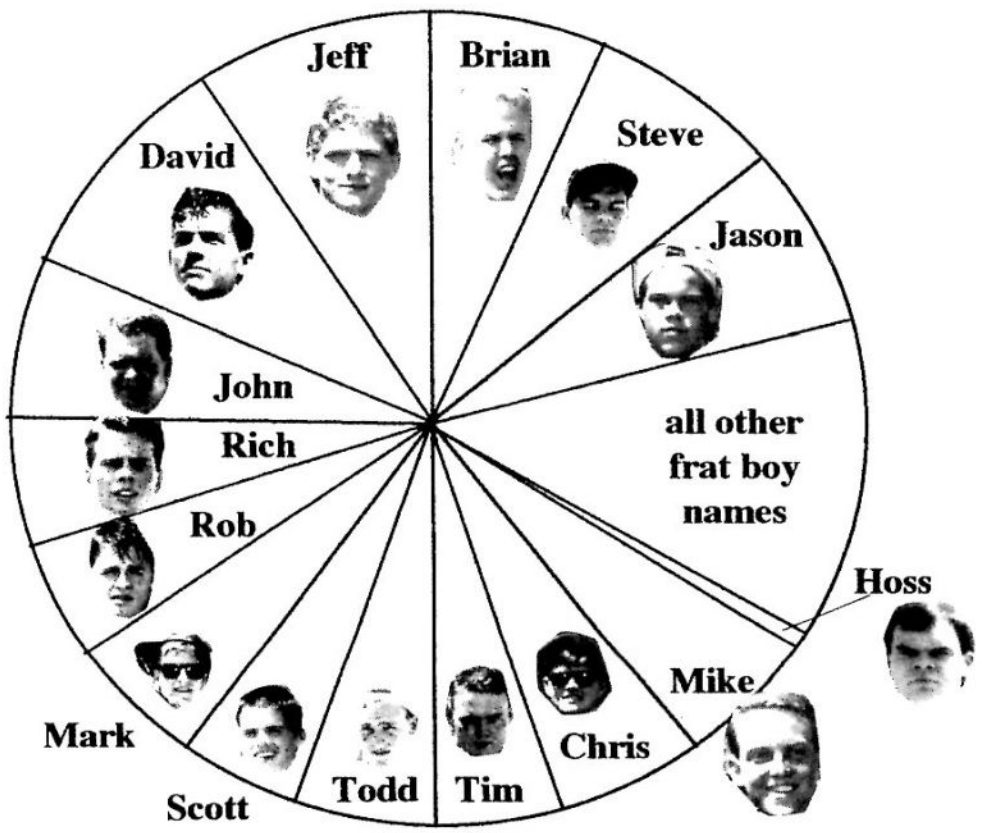
Below are the results of an exclusive **HITCH** investigation, done with the help of resident statistician Chance Giffhorn, revealing the most popular names of fraternity men, according to the study's sample of a recent University of Oklahoma pledge class. Applying the results, good news if your name is Jeff or David! You have a 10 percent chance of being in a frat on name alone! Here are the complete results, listing the names to have and the corresponding chances of being that guy you run into at a party who asks, "Hey, Tacker! Wanna brewski?"

NAME	% AGE OF FRAT BOYS WITH THAT NAME
Jeff	10%
David	10%
Steve	7%
Brian	7%
John	7%
Jason	6%
Chris	5%
Mike	5%
Todd	4%
Tim	4%
Scott	4%
Rich	4%
Rob	4%
Mark	4%
Hoss	0.2%

The world's most famous Roman goes Greek as the Dekes initiate Pope John Paul II into their beloved organization.

WHEEL OF FORTUNATE NAMES

Compiled by Chance Giffhorn



MARGIN OF ERROR: + / - 3 percentage pts.

HE-MAN ADVENTURE

ATTENTION RACE FANS!

Darryl Starbird and the He-man: A Battle of Cultures

By Rod Lott

You know the commercials: "RACE FANS! *RACE FANS!*" they scream, enticing you to run downtown for Darryl Starbird's National Rod and Custom Car Show and Monster Truck Races. But have you ever actually gone? Odds are, if you were able to read down this far, you have not.

And for that, you should be proud. Starbird's annual *soiree* (believe it or not, he's up to 36) is a highly disturbing event, suitable only for those who wish the State Fair also took place in the month of January.

My first thoughts upon entering the Myriad Convention Center Sunday afternoon were:

1. Gee, there sure are a lot of cars here.

2. I want my money back.

This he-man felt completely out of place, as most of the crowd sported Garth Brooks hats and either red or green jeans. These are the kind of people whose sole knowledge of French culture is limited to the word "chassis." I'm pretty sure the entire population of Yukon, Okla. was there.

Looking at all the cars was rather repetitive, if not pointless; most had fuzzy dice dangling from the rear-view mirror. The owners were proud to let you know how much money they had invested in each vehicle (averaging $40,000) by posting the figures on a sign. However, it would seem to me that the car would be severely devalued by painting on the side of it, "Thanks Tina, Granny & Dixie."

A good portion of the cars had gimmicky names, like "Raisin' Hell," a purple truck on the bed of which stood an immaculate and impressive display of California Raisin figurines. Sitting next to a restored Volkswagen Bug was a can of oil which the owner had labeled in bright red letters, "OEL."

Of course, the big attraction was, as the TV ads boasted, "the Batmobile, from the *actual* movie!" (What movie, *Used People*?) Incidentally, you could take home a Polaroid of you and the Batmobile for *only* $5.

Rod chats with Beverly (left) in front of the mag wheels at the custom car show.

Surrounding the "over 500 exotic cars" were the vendors (sample name: Hawg Haven), selling everything from rusted license plates and "Bitch Parking Only" signs to "I've Fallen and I Can't Reach My Beer" T-shirts and custom-made plates reading "Kiss My Achy Breaky Butt!"

Also manning booths were Craftsman Tools, with a screwdriver blowout sale; Skoal, handing out smokeless tobacco samples as if the apocalypse was near; and MetroTech, demonstrating its commitment to post-high school education by dispensing helium balloons along with pamphlets heralding lucrative welding careers. The guy making submarine sandwiches was picking his teeth with his fingernail.

Providing "entertainment" was a country cover band named — if my eyes served me right — "Live & Kicken." They played horrible songs like "Achy Breaky Heart," which people actually listened and danced to.

Also providing entertainment were the swimsuit-clad women standing in front of cars — or, in the case of the one I spoke with — a wheel display. I had my picture taken with Beverly, the friendly model with one helluva meticulous bikini wax. It must be noted that Beverly was the only model: a) without cellulite, b) capable of phrasing a question in the form of a question, and c) able to spell her name, and correctly.

But the *highlight of the day* was the Calendar Girl Pageant, *hands down*. Ten contestants were brought out to parade about onstage to the tunes of Tom Cochrane and the like. I actually went to high school with one of the contestants, though I am certain she has undergone breast augmentation since those days. (And if she doesn't quit

Typical hick's idea of a funny gag: Fake hand under car, complete with beer and cig. Ha.

The real Batmobile. (Fake Batman.)

tanning so heavily, it's only a matter of months before she goes in for a skin graft.)

During the trying Q&A round, the emcee asked Tamara — who I'm sure is a table dancer somewhere within the metro area — whom she would most like to be for a day. She said, without hesitation, "Christie Brinkley."

"You're pretty sure of that, huh?" the emcee asked.

"Yeah," Tamara said. "Because she's beautiful and rich and famous."

Three Hooters girls watched the proceedings. A ponytailed man standing directly behind these behinds told his grade-school son, "Now there's the kind of girl you want to marry."

The next contestant was Tanya, a dead ringer for Chelsea Clinton. The emcee asked Tanya, "what was the one thing you've done in the past year that was most significant?"

Tanya, apparently having known the word "significant," answered, "I graduated from middle school."

After a quick judges' tally, the winners were named. To their credit, the judges picked the only three girls that didn't look like they were the progeny of squirrels. Tanya was not among the winners, and I think it's a bit unfair, because they asked her a question with a four-syllable word in it, and I fear it may have thrown her.

With hindsight, I think it says a lot about me that I ran into absolutely nobody I know. I spent two and a half hours there, and I count on my left hand the number of women there who could without a doubt be deemed both "women" and "attractive."

Experiences like these take years of therapy to shake, and I emerged smelling only faintly of cigarettes. I left just as the monster trucks began firing up (which was smart, as I value my hearing), with a heightened sense of knowing better and a hope that someone pointed Tanya the way to the MetroTech booth.

Top 10 Things Actually Overheard at Darryl Starbird's 36th Annual National Rod and Custom Car Show and Monster Truck Races (No Kidding)

10. "I'm so thirsty I could spit cotton!"
9. "Lookie there, it's Darryl! Right in front'a ya!"
8. "Fuckin' asshole!" (Said by a photographer trying to take a picture of a '25 T-bucket Roadster as someone strolled in front of him.
7. Son: "Look, Dad, it's just like yours!"
Dad: "No, this is a '*37*. Mine's a '*36*. Get it straight."
6. "Didja see that ZZ Top car? Man, I bet they can write that off as advertising."
5. "*That'd* be fun to work on!"
4. "Man, this bratwurst really *is* the best."
3. "Do you gotta color chart?"
2. "We come in on a chicken truck."
1. "If they're Calendar Girls, how come there's only 10 of 'em?"

A HE-MAN ADVENTURE

Boldly Going Where No He-man Has Gone Before

By Rod Lott

I believe Capt. Kirk said it best: "Get a life!" William Shatner screamed, in a now-classic *Saturday Night Live* sketch. "I mean, for God's sake, it's just a TV show!"

He was right; *Star Trek* really *is* just a TV show, and a lame one at that. He was addressing the legions of fans — or Trekkies, as they're collectively known — that have seemingly devoted their lives to watching, analyzing, absorbing, cataloguing and worshipping all things *Star Trek*.

Their ardency for this late-'60s throwback and its spin-offs, movies and merchandise is at a peak today, so much that these fools with far too much spare time on their hands find it necessary to gather as a whole periodically. Trekkies call their get-togethers *Star Trek* conventions, wherein they swap items, relay trivia and dress up as their favorite characters and frighten small children.

Not even Oklahoma City is immune to this pestilent display of outcasts, as the Myriad Convention Center became home to one of these conventions for a spring weekend. Proving the "if you build it, they will come" adage to be true, the Trekkies preyed upon the Myriad grounds like crazed locusts, with a cultish zeal heretofore matched only by the Mormons.

Your typical Trekkie is either a meteorology major, a general science buff or some type of fallen-through-the-cracks personality. They frequent Supercuts, were putting together Snap-Tite™ models in no time flat at the age of two and, at some point in their lives, have blown an entire week's pay at Radio Shack. They also are not above being seen in public dressed as reptilian beings from other worlds.

By the time I arrived, I had missed the music video salute to Counselor Troi (*damn!*) and pushed my way through the dealers' room, where every imaginable *Star Trek* item could be purchased, from $40 T-shirts to posters that read, "All I need to know about life I learned from *Star Trek*" (social skills excluded). One conventioneer uttered with excitement, "Oh, I didn't see the neckties! Those are *cool!*"

One lanky dealer was explaining to prospective suckers the color differences of the Enterprise crew uniforms he had for sale. "Maroon is best for the captains," he said.

"Oh, man, that's a shame," I said, "because I look best in blue."

I slipped into the darkened auditorium where hundreds of freakish

Proud member of the Klingon Imperial Guard and eligible bachelor No. 1, Toe-chee.
(photos by Craig Szijarto)

wallflowers drooled over slides from *Star Trek: Deep Space Nine*. When the lights went up, self-proclaimed *Star Trek* research consultant Richard Arnold took questions from the audience. It must be noted that Arnold feels so confident of his expert status that he refers to Shatner simply as "Bill."

Sample questions included:

• "Did we ever get the names of the enemies in the wormholes?"

• "Getting back to Dax, what if she gets pregnant?"

• "Is it possible that any of the original crew members besides Kirk and Spock fathered any children that can appear on future episodes?"

Arnold answered every question with an equal mix of lingo and hullabaloo. To the question "Will we see Q more?," Arnold screamed, "*God*, we've seen him *twice* on *Next Gen* and *once already* on *Deep Space Nine*! Q shows are very expensive!"

Hey, Rich, *settle down*.

Said one man who had forgotten his question earlier, "On the episode 'I, Borg,' after they implemented the thoughts in his brain, there was an inkling that he knew what was going on. They never made a mention of a future episode and that seemed to me the perfect opening for another show."

Arnold agreed. Someone inquired, "Are they going to bring back Denise Crosby?" and Arnold chuckled. "She is *dead!*" he cried hysterically. "She is so dead you wouldn't believe it! They already *brought her back* as a half-Romulan daughter!"

An eight-toothed woman in a ragged Ozzy Osbourne T-shirt was videotaping the whole session.

Then we were treated to a music video salute to the "sexy stars of *Star Trek*," all to the tune of Right Said Fred's "I'm Too Sexy." People actually applauded at this crap. Immediately following was a salute to Majel Barrett Roddenberry. Other than that she's creator Gene Roddenberry's widow, I have no idea who she is; from the clips, I can only gather that she turned up on the show from time to time as an intergalactic whore.

"Hey, man, I'll give you my Members Only jacket for that Sulu model kit you got."

I approached a 400-pound man dressed as a Klingon. He repeatedly announced his name was "Toe-chee."

"Toe-chee" is not married.

Two-thirty brought the start of the much-awaited sound-alike competition, in which one could "win $100 in *Star Trek* prizes by imitating the voice and/or mannerisms of any *Trek* character, actor, villain or prop!" Among the participants were a woman, two bespectacled boys in Tuffskins with long and difficult lives ahead of them and — I kid you not — a man wearing a wolf mask.

The highlight of the contest came when a cowboy said, "Beam me up, Scotty." Arnold laughed at him and said, "You know what's funny about that, don't you?" The audience, in near-unison, shouted, *"No one ever said that anywhere in the series!"* (And you thought there were a lot of zeroes in the federal deficit.)

During the audience participation discussion on the burning question, "What do *you* want to see in *Star Trek VII*?," I queried random Trekkies as to their all-time favorite *Star Trek* episode and why.

Sandy, 28, who spoke with his hands, said, "I'd have to say 'Balance of Terror,' because the Romulan commander and Capt. Kirk go back and forth and they knew what each other was going to do before they did, except for a few certain instances."

I then approached the acne-stricken Paul, also 28, who was sitting against the wall sharing popcorn with a pal. "I don't recall the exact name of the episode," Paul said shockingly, "but it's from *Next*

Generation. It's the one where Capt. Picard was hit by a probe, causing him to lose consciousness and wake in the body of someone else on another planet and he gets to live that person's entire life out on the planet. I like it because it's a concept episode and it makes you think, 'What *if* this *really* happened? *To live two lives in one lifetime?*"

By this point, Paul was salivating, so I turned to his friend Jason, 16, who said, "My favorite would be 'The Cage,' because it's one of the first ones where Capt. Kirk—"

Paul interrupted. "Capt. *Kirk?* Are you *crazy?* It was Capt. *Pike!*"

"Oh, yeah, Pike," Jason repeated.

"Sheesh!" Paul said, outraged at his friend's momentary lapse of reason.

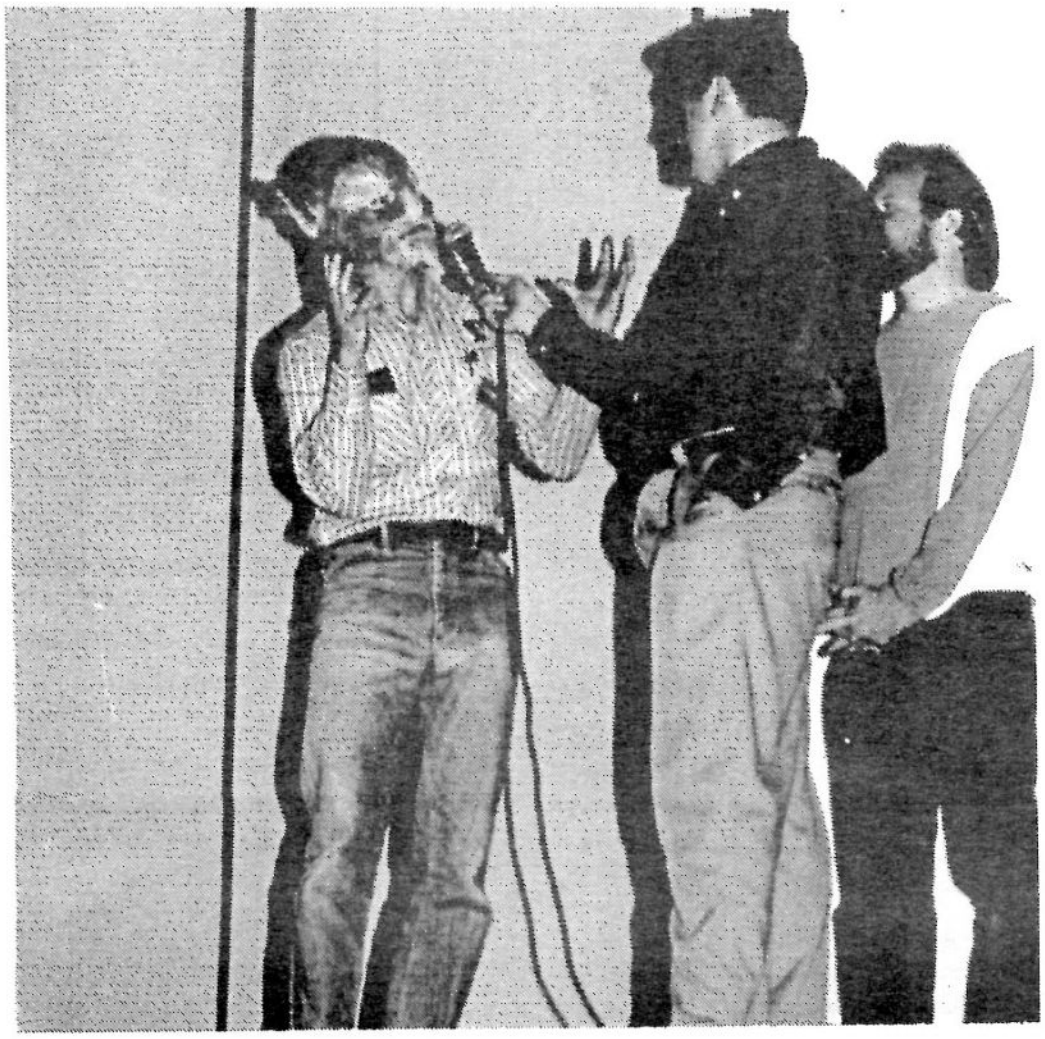
Jason continued. "It was one of the first episodes where Pike actually showed his true feelings toward Klingons and other alien races he didn't like."

Having boldly gone where no heman had gone before, I decided it was *way* past time to leave, missing the auction, the salute to Data and — in person — Grace Lee Whitney (Yeoman Rand herself, whoever the hell that is).

On our way out, we encountered an abdominous woman dressed as some character or another — exactly who we know not, but she wore green blush and her eyebrows had the same arc as the windows of the Coliseum. I asked her what effect Spock has had on American culture.

The woman smiled and said, "Well, *everybody* knows him. He's an honest individual who introduced the idea of thinking logically before doing something."

That's all fine and dandy, Galaxina, but it still doesn't explain the pointy ears.



During the impression contest, Wolfie scares *and* delights.

Deconstructing Mentos

By Rod Lott

Young, hip viewers of cable television watch primarily young, hip cable stations — E!, Comedy Central, the Sci-Fi Channel, et al. Hoping to reach these dollar-driven teens, a candy company has been bombarding their airwaves with commercials featuring young, hip protagonists, all set to a young, hip pop-music beat. Yet they're selling much more than confectioneries.

With Mentos, the young, hip pasty mints, a world that is full of rebellion and free sex is a world that is good. By watching any of the Mentos ads, one cannot deny the subliminal messages inherent in the cleverly staged visuals. Even the announcer's voice hints at a Dutch accent, linking him to a country known for its animal instincts. By watching many of them, certain factors begin to rear their heads throughout; for instance, *two* Mentos mints are always consumed by the protagonist, one prior to and one immediately following the climax of the spot. Thus, a Mentos mint acts not only as the aphrodisiac, but also the post-coital cigarette.

Though there are many other ads which all prove the same, here are perhaps three of the most blatant.

THE MALL

1. Mischievous blonde-haired boy protagonist cavorts about the local shopping mall with his gang of unruly friends, no doubt up to little, if any, good. Their exuberant, devil-may-care demeanor leads viewer to believe they have just completed a satisfying lunch at Hot Dog on a Stick and probably are en route to the arcade to push third-graders around.

2. Boy is distracted by sight of his mother / aunt / grandmother in the mall, wielding an umbrella. This suggests her years of unrelenting physical and mental abuse on the boy has provoked a visceral fear within him.

3. Popping a Mentos in his mouth, he runs to hide from this matronly figure of authority. He succeeds by posing amongst mannequins, which she bypasses. His choice of disguises suggests both a confusion of adolescent sexual identity and frozen familial emotions. As she leaves, he pops another Mentos.

4. As woman descends escalator, boy reveals his presence to her with a wicked smile and by flashing his roll of Mentos at the woman in a forthright — and rather threatening — manner, as if it were a phallus, or at least an extension thereof. This

gesture not only conveys an attitude of "Look here, you ungrateful bitch: I evaded you with the help of *these* pasty mints," but also a stern, rebellious "Fuck you!" and furthermore, "Fuck you with Mentos!"

5. Woman offers a look of surrender, admitting defeat, at least this time around. Pals pat boy on the back to show their support, for telling one's parents to fuck off in public is cool.

THE INTERSECTION

1. Mischievous blonde-haired boy protagonist cavorts outside the town one sunny day with his gang of unruly friends, no doubt up to little, if any, good. Their carefree, joyous expressions lead viewer to believe they have just harassed some old people exiting the corner market.

2. Boy is prevented from crossing the busy street — unlike his pals — by bumper-to-bumper traffic stopped at the light. His friends egg him on from the opposite side of the street. Apparently rushed for time and visibly flustered, the boy contemplates his predicament. Should *he risk life* and limb, or wait for the "walk" signal like responsible citizens? This marked indecision suggests a lost adolescent soul, eager to please his classmates, even if it translates into eschewing time-honored social morays.

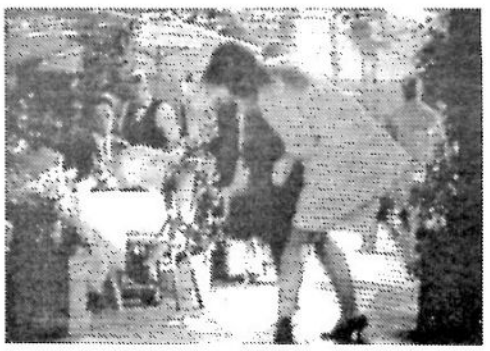
3. Popping a Mentos in his mouth, he embarks on his brave sojourn across bustling traffic, making the journey by cutting through a man's expensive town car as a short cut, thus conveying the boy's distaste for the capitalist class system.

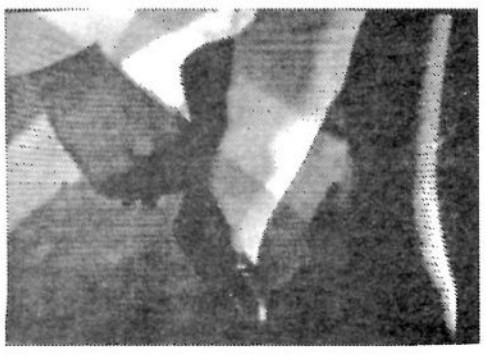
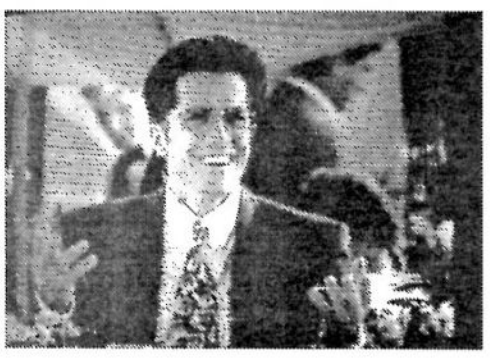
4. Rich man in car on cellular phone is surprised at the abrupt violation of his personal space and property. Boy pops another Mentos and responds with a wicked smile and by flashing his roll of Mentos at the man in a vindictive, "I showed you" manner, as if it were a switchblade.

5. Rich man in car laughs, because as a youth, he, too, knew the power and joy of Mentos. Pals smile to show their support, for standing up to The Man is totally bitchin'. The man's "oh, for fun" temperament, does not falter, despite the fact that, unbeknownst to him, the teens will follow him home, only to return late that night to kill him.

Mentos: The Song

(jauntily)
Doobie do doo / Do be do waaahhh
It doesn't matter what comes / Fresh goes better with life
And Mentos is fresh and full of life
Nothing gets to you / Staying fresh, staying cool
With Mentos fresh and full of life
Fresh goes better / (Mentos freshness)
Fresh goes better / With Mentos fresh and full of life
(spoken)
Mentos: The freshmaker!



THE SIDEWALK CAFE

1. Mischievous blonde-haired girl protagonist, on the streets of downtown one sunny day, gives her "girlfriend" (read: lover) a good-bye hug. Their lighthearted, happy-go-lucky dispositions lead viewer to believe they have just enjoyed a mid-afternoon tryst.

2. Girl is kept from walking very far, however, when one of the heels of her shoes breaks in front of a sidewalk cafe, much to the delight of a young, yuppie-type man enjoying a meal.

3. Popping a Mentos in her mouth, she sits to yank off the heels of both shoes, an obvious castration fantasy suppressed of years of sexual abuse by her father.

4. Yuppie man is amused, yet oddly intrigued, by the girl's defiance at fashion in a world driven by vanity. Girl pops another Mentos and flashes her roll of Mentos at the man in a seductive, "Come get me" manner, as if showing what she would do should the two entwine.

5. Her action — an outright phallic one — will prove ironic, for when the two do meet offscreen later that night, he will find out that she is not a she after all, but one, like he, who possesses a penis. She, too – albeit in a method markedly different from those employed in previous advertisements — will stick it to The Man.

What do the critics have to say about
DAMAGEDhearing, VOLUMEone?

"Buy it ... to burn it!" –*Spin*
"Yoyoyo! Dis sum stoopid shit!" –*Vibe*

Be like Danny from NKOTB and listen for yourself to find out why the critics hate DAMAGEDhearing! Feat. non-hits from *Switchblade Sisters*, *Alleycat Rock: Sex Hunter*, *Jailbait Babysitter* and many more!

Rush $5 for each cassette to:
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2728 N.W. 47th, Oklahoma City, OK 73112

This tape is free. The $5 price goes to cover the cost of packing and shipping. No rights are implied or to be inferred. Sold collector to collector only.

BACK ISSUE BLOWOUT!

All back issues just $3.50 each! Mail cash, check or money order to: HITCH, P.O. Box 23621, Oklahoma City, OK 73123-2621

#8 • AUGUST/SEPTEMBER 1995 • Fast food horrors, chiropractors exposed, McDonald's fun facts, Gulf War injury photos, the Hootie-O-Matic and interviews with Leatherface, Tommy James and some guy from *Baywatch*. (44 pgs.)

#15 • SPRING 1997 • The tortures of Lamaze class, revisiting *Twin Peaks*, the HITCH Guide to Employment, a he-man adventure in Hawaii, interview with an Afrin junkie, *Shazam!* incomplete episode guide, war of the chicken fry and the infamous Julia-Roberts-in-a-towel letter.

Also available: #7, #9-10, #13-14, #16-19

The HITCH Dreidel

By Joe Rogers

DREIDEL: AN INTRODUCTION

Dreidel is the most popular game played during the holiday of Hanukkah (or, more archiac, Chanukkah), the Jewish equivalent to Christmas. It's a gambling game. What you do is you spin a top and the side that it lands on determines your winnings or losses. You can use whatever you have around the house to bet with (i.e. coins, poker chips), but things to eat (munchies) are the funnest, because playing dreidel has been known to make people crave something to snack on when the game gets exciting!

THE HITCH DREIDEL

We at **HITCH**, as a gift of thanks for buying our magazine, expand your cultural know-how with the free **HITCH** Dreidel, provided here. Custom-made and sure to please, just follow the instructions and have fun with the **HITCH** Dreidel!

E-Z INSTRUCTIONS

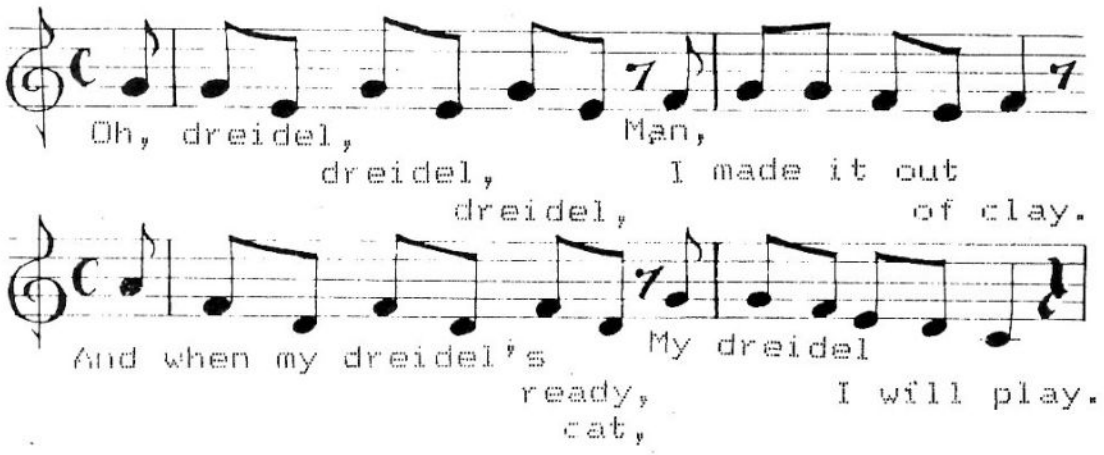
1 Cut out.
2 Stick a pin through the X's.
3 Fold into a cube as shown and glue together.
4 Spin it like a top.
5 Grab those munchies!

SCORING: WHAT THOSE FACES MEAN

Barbara Streisand — win
Neil Diamond — sing a few stanzas of "September Morn"
Woody Allen — ramble incessantly about your hernia operation
Bob Dylan — lose

HAPPY DREIDEL SONGS WITH SAMMY

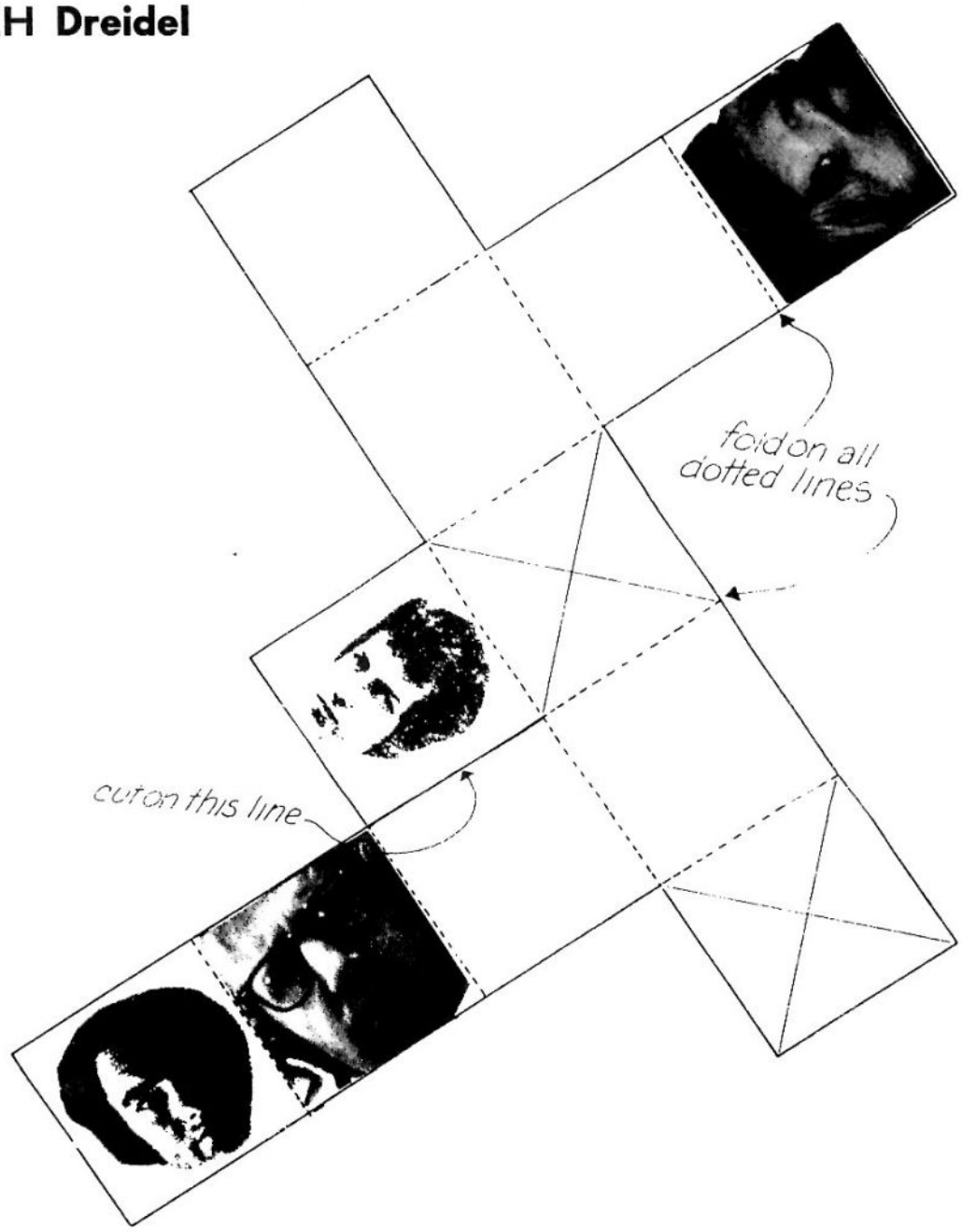
Sing one (or all!) of these snappy verses while playing with the dreidel. Fashion a whistle out of a little raisin box for added musical effect.

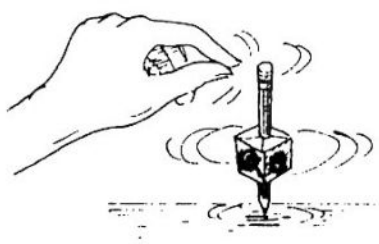


2. I'll take my little dreidel
   And give it a good strong spin.
   I hope it lands on Barbra,
   For then I'm sure to win.

3. If I spin Woody, I ramble,
   But lose if I spin Bob.
   I get the pot with Barbra,
   With Neil I sing a song.

The HITCH Dreidel





Knick-Knack, Paddy-Whack, Gave My Dogs Some Bones

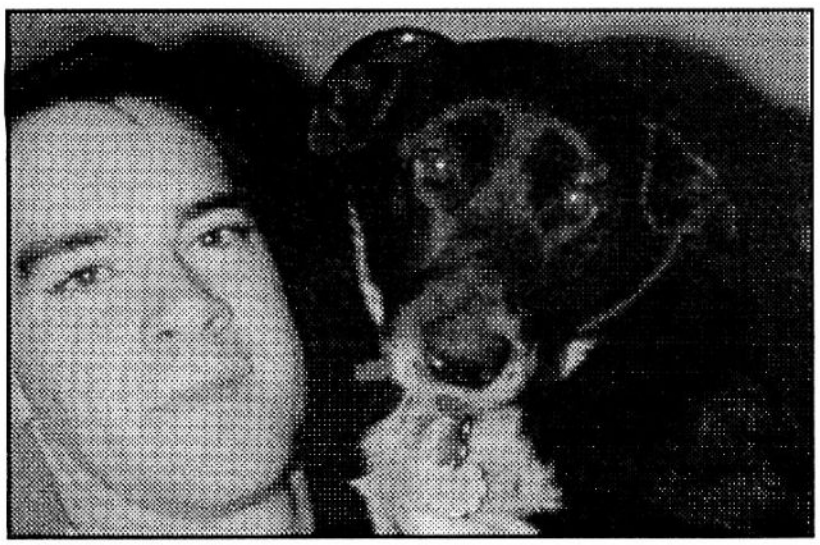
A HITCH Investigation
By Ken Davis

I am a dog lover.

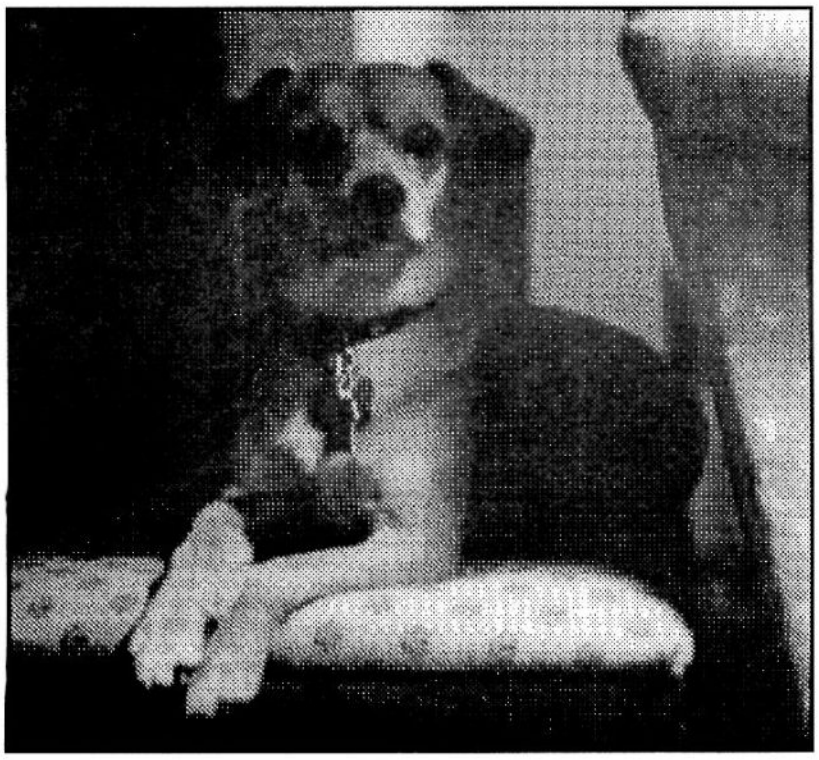
I haven't always had this affection for canines, though; I remember as a child, a mangy old stray that would loiter in front of our house because my brother kept feeding it. I would shoot it with a pellet gun just because I didn't like it hanging around.

But I have evolved into a man who loves dogs with the same zeal as David Letterman. Like most pet owners, I give my dogs treats from time to time. They like rawhide chewies, cow hooves, table scraps and Milk-Bones.

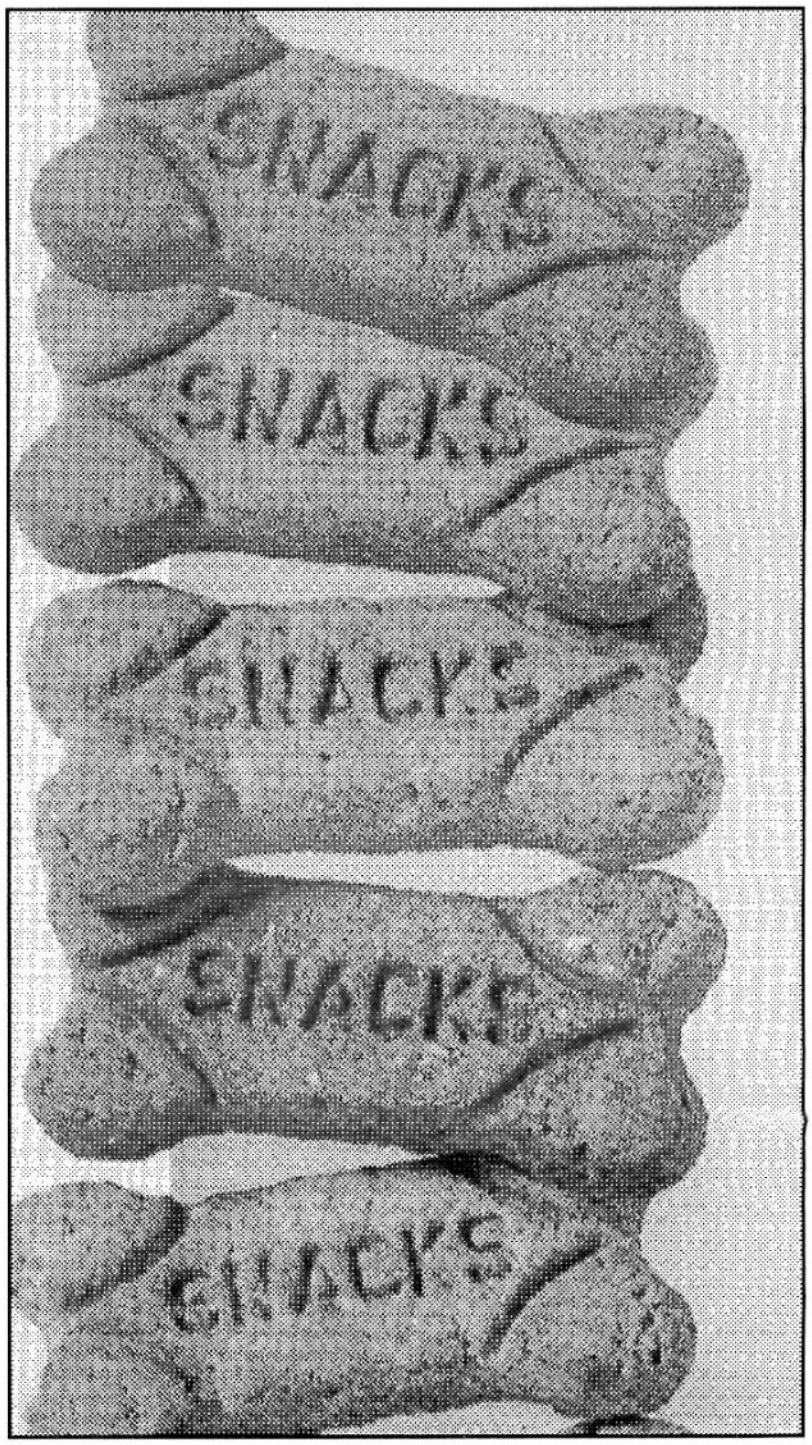
The good folks that produce the original Milk-Bone brand biscuits make some pretty lofty claims about their product on the back of the box. Being the consumer advocate I am, I tested each one of these seven claims. The following chart compares said claims with my dogs' reactions.



The investigator with subject A, Susie.



Subject B, Tinker.



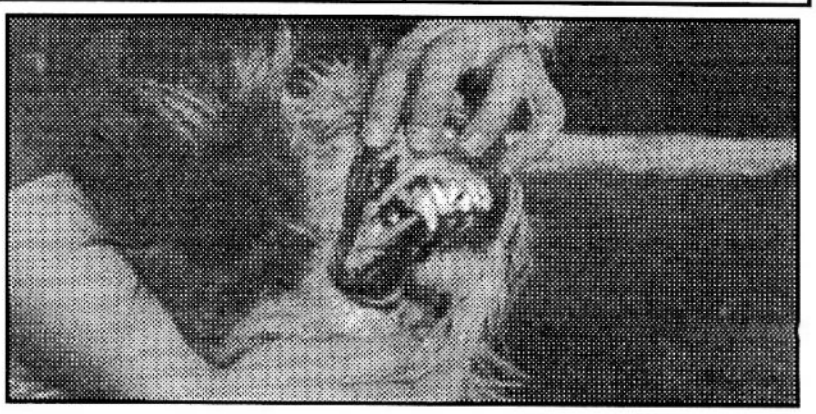
	LOFTY CLAIM	TINKER'S REACTION	SUSIE'S REACTION
BACON	"Your dog will think it's hot off the frying pan."	Ran into the living room; ate it under the sofa.	Quickly ate it; gave a hearty burp.
MEAT	"A flavor no dog can resist."	Ran into the living room; ate it under the sofa.	Ate this one more slowly, but seemed to enjoy it.
CHEESE	"One is hardly ever enough!"	Ran into the living room; ate it under the sofa.	Layed down in front of the TV and licked it before consuming.
LIVER	"...with all the taste your dog loves."	Ran into the living room; ate it under the chair.	Swallowed this one whole.
MILK	"...a crunchy, delicious biscuit."	Ran into the living room; ate it under the sofa.	Gave it to Tinker.
POULTRY	"Your dog will bark with delight!"	Ran into the living room; ate it under the sofa.	Barked with delight!
VEGETABLE	"...flavor he wants — but can rarely get."	Ran into the living room; ate it under the sofa.	Looked at it; walked away.

When Your Sheepdog's Got the Runs

Constipation: Diet is usually to blame. Give your dog something else to eat. Provide more vegetables and roughage like kibble and dog biscuits. For fast relief, use milk of magnesia — a child's dose; or, if you prefer, olive oil straight or mixed in with his food.

Diarrhea: This, too, is frequently the result of wrong diet. Mix boiled rice and cooked hamburger together, half and half. To this add 10 percent of the total bulk in canned tomatoes or cottage cheese. For severe continuing cases, give the dog six ounces of black coffee sweetened with Karo syrup. Remove all drinking water but give him ice cubes to lick when thirsty.

Worms: Even the best-cared-for dogs are subject to worms. Symptoms: Actual appearance of the worm of worm segments in bowel movements or vomit. A "potbelly," diarrhea, persistent vomiting, runny (but not mucousy) eyes and



nose are also signs. Dragging the rump on the floor is sometimes an indication, but this usually means there is an accumulation of impacted matter in the dog's anal glands which should be removed.

Take a sample of your dog's stool in a small jar to your vet. He will examine it microscopically to determine what type of worm, if any, your dog has.

Excerpts from Know Your Old English Sheepdog, *by Earl Schneider, New York: The Pet Library.*

HITCH Talks To Robert Goulet

Some Enchanted Evening, You May Feel My Prostate

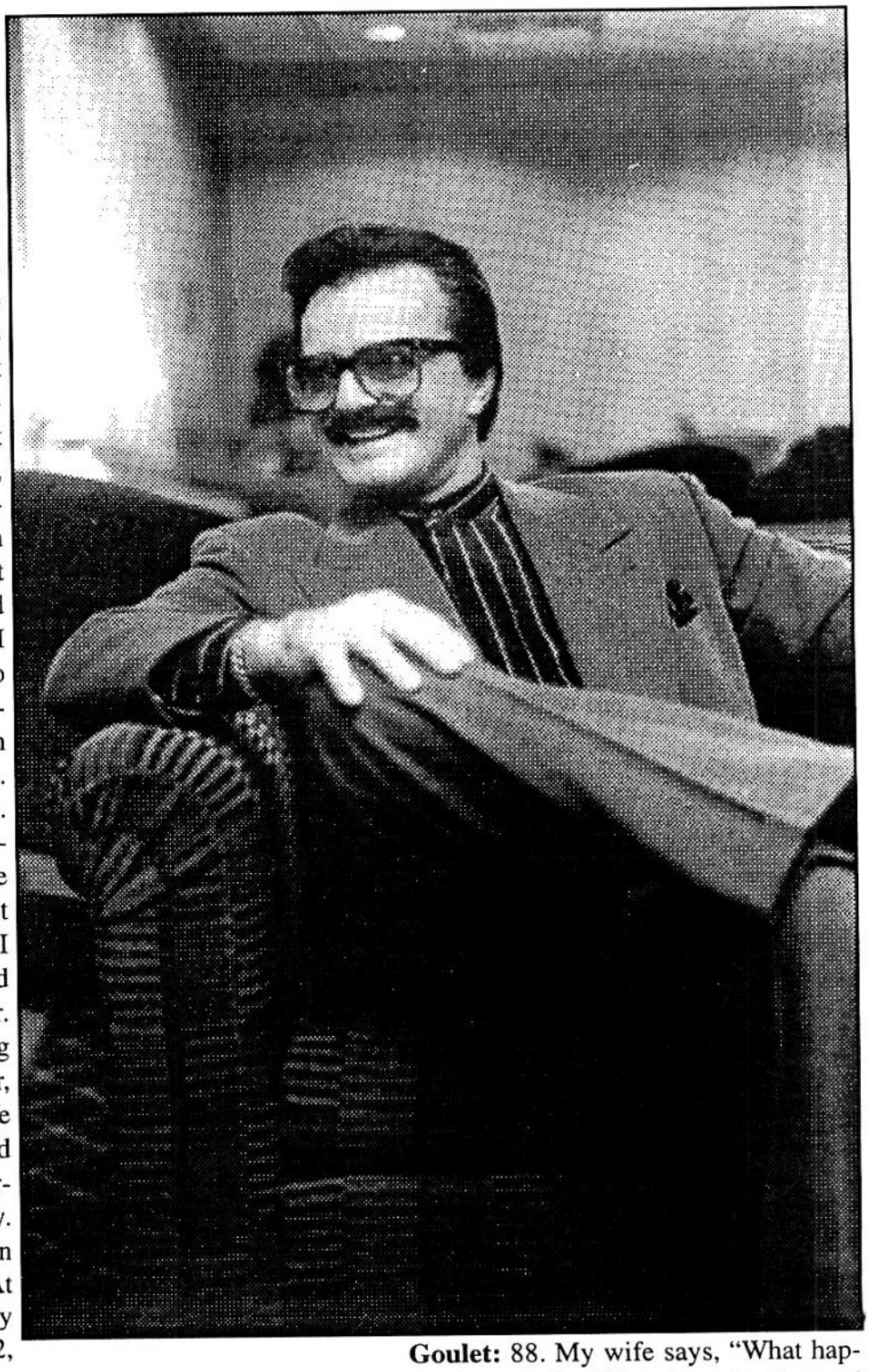
By Rod Lott

Singer and sometime actor Robert Goulet returned to the Oklahoma City stage for one enchanted evening late in September. This trip, however, he wasn't here to belt out cheesy show tunes for the blue-haired crowd, but to talk candidly about his battle with prostate cancer.

As a public service to **HITCH** readers who won't hit the prostate age for at least another two decades or so, we present the following uncensored interview with the mustachioed man whose ego is so big, he's not afraid to skirt the subject to reveal his plans for world domination.

HITCH: When did your bout with prostate cancer start?

Goulet: Oh, I think it was in 1991 when Dr. Kipper in Los Angeles. I wasn't feeling well and he said, "I'm going to give you a PSA test." I didn't know what it was. I said, "What is it for?" He said it was for the detection of prostate cancer. I hadn't heard about that, and the PSA came out between 3 and 4 and he said, "That's fine. That's normal, nothing to be concerned about." About a year later, I have an exam for an insurance policy for a production of *Camelot* that I was doing and it turned out that the PSA was like between 7 and 8, and that's in one year. He said, "Now we have to keep an eye on it." So six months later after we did the run of the show, we had some time off and I had to get another exam, I needed another physical. So I take another PSA test. The insurance company didn't ask for it; we insisted on it. Whoops! Between 11 and 12. That was rather quick, so I went to L.A. and had all the tests — the MRIs and the bone scans, the cultures. If you know anything about it, the cultures is between zero and 5. Zero is good, 5 is bad. And one set was 3.5, the other was 3.4, so it was cancer. I said, "Let's (phft!) take it out." I didn't want to take chances with chemotherapy or radiation. I had to get back to work so I had no time left, and said, "Let's get rid of it, I've got five to six weeks before I have to be back." I was surprised that my lower intestinal tract was blocked, so they couldn't operate on me at that time. I waited five months, I took drugs to keep the cancer from spreading. And I did. And on December the 7th, I had it removed. I was laced with cancer. But according to the doctor, he said, "We got it all and need no further therapy. Just keep an eye on it." At last count, my PSA was 0.2, so it's gone.



HITCH: What is your age?

Goulet: 60.

HITCH: Did it affect your outlook on life any?

Goulet: Hell, no! I'm gonna die when I'm 88; I got it all planned.

HITCH: 88?

Goulet: 88. My wife says, "What happens when you're 87 and you're in good health. Are you gonna change your mind?" and I say, "I might." Heh-heh-heh! I think 88's a good time to go and see the Lord. What the hell? He's been waiting a long time for me. Get me in the choir...oh, I'll be up there. Me and Gordon McRae.

HITCH: Why are you here today?

Bob attempts to regale — but instead visbly bores — Rod with visual aids regarding the size of his once-inflamed gland.

What message do you hope to bring?

Goulet: I'm just gonna try and tell people who are, you know, in their 40s to go and get the PSA test and make sure that they get control of their lives. If I hadn't had my PSA test, I'd probably be dead within a year.

HITCH: Do you think that you being a celebrity will make people listen more?

Goulet: Hopefully. I did something on *Good Morning America* that had response from several people that said they went in and got their tests and it saved their lives, so therefore, if that can happen just once, it's all worthwhile.

HITCH: I'd like to ask you a question about your career. Your generation is the one that made you famous, whereas my generation missed out on *Camelot* and all that, but you've endeared yourself to my generation through your appearances in *Naked Gun 2 1/2*, *Scrooged*, *Police Squad!* Has that brought you a younger following?

Goulet: I think so to a certain extent, but just doing *The Simpsons* brought me more young fans than anything else, and it was just a little piece of cake, that took me 5 minutes to record it, but most of my work — when I got my Emmys and my Tonys — were in the early '60s and you weren't even born yet.

HITCH: Right.

Goulet: So that the people who see me now don't know what the hell I've done! I've recorded 40 albums, and nobody ever has heard them, yet I got a Grammy for being the best recording artist of 1962. That was 33 years ago. And kids today — if I was born 20 years later, I'd have a guitar in my hand and I'd own half of Los Angeles.

HITCH: What upcoming projects do you have?

Goulet: Oh, I'm going to be doing more concert work; that is, with the symphonies. I might even come here; who knows? Uh, a little more acting. I just did a *Burke's Law*, I did a walk-on on Don Adams' *Get Smart*. They're bringing that back. I did a walk-on, just a cute little thing, two seconds. And then I did a walk-on for Jay Leno that'll be on Tuesday night. But I'm going to do more acting. Leslie Brickess, I don't know if you know who he is—

HITCH: No.

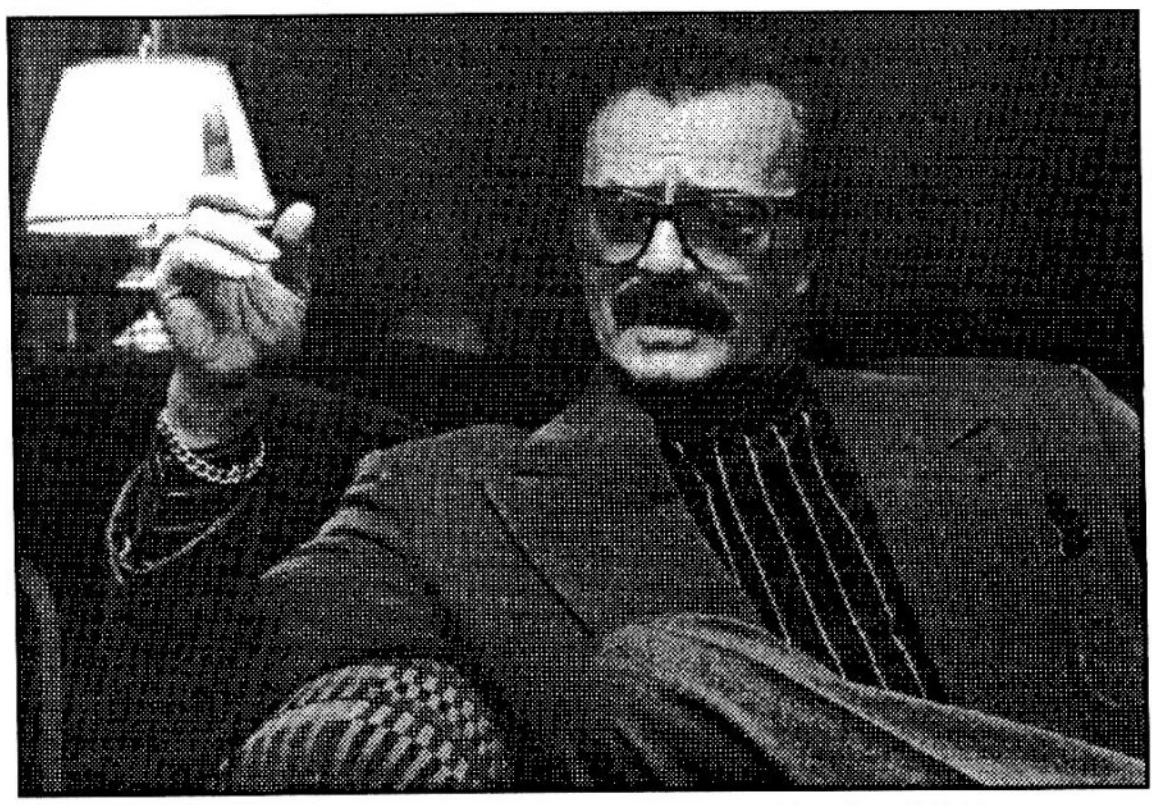
Goulet: He's a writer. He wrote *Stop the World, I Want To Get Off* and several other musicals. *Doctor Dolittle*. That's all before your time. But he's written a musical right now, he's just finished it with the late Hank Mancini — *Victor Victoria*, which will star Julie Andrews. He's got a Jekyll and Hyde musical coming out, and then he wants to do a musical on King Henry the Eighth that he calls *Henry's Wives*, and he wants me to play Henry the Eighth, and he's not gonna do this for five years. And I don't think I'm right, but he says, "Yes, you are, Robert. No one else can do it better than you." So I'm gonna go out there with hats on and kill my wives — you know, it should be fun. But that's maybe...uh, '95 or '96.

HITCH: Did your prostate problems affect your career any?

Goulet: No. Just, uh, I went back to work three weeks after the operation.

HITCH: So you caught it just in time before it had any long-term effects?

Goulet: I guess so. If I waited, because the prostate cancer can spread very quickly. Once it does that, it gets into your lymph system and then, uh, you had it. You can live maybe five years, 10 years. I'm told Mike Milken could live another 15

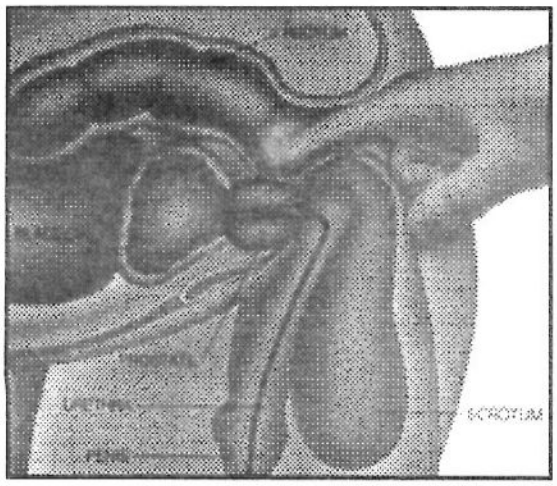


Bob channels the spirit of deceased pal Gordon McRae.

years, but he may not. And it's a shame, because the man's got 500 million bucks and he's not gonna be able to spend it. I'll find a way! Michael, let me help you!...Oh, you're gonna print that?

HITCH: Just taking notes. Do you have any medical advice for the people who are starting to hit their 40s?

Goulet: Get a test! Don't wait around, don't play with it. We've lost people in their late 40s and early 50s because they



didn't get a test. Simple thing. We didn't have the test 15 years ago. Now we do. Simple little thing. A little needle, a little blood, they let you know. Because my digital exam showed nothing. I had no enlargement, no problems with my bladder, none whatsoever. Even a week before the operation, everything was fine. But, hey, he pulled it out and said, "You were laced, kid, you were laced."

HITCH: Was it scary at all for you?

Goulet: No. No, I've had operations before. It's gotta come out! Why be worried about that? If I'm gonna die, I die, and if the cancer spreads and I have to get chemotherapy, I'll get chemotherapy. What I was worried most about was incontinency, but I was continent *(knocks on wood)* so I was lucky.

HITCH: Okay.

Goulet: Alright!

HITCH: That's all the questions I have. Could I get a picture with you?

Goulet: No.

HITCH: No?

Goulet: Well, you just took 14 of them!

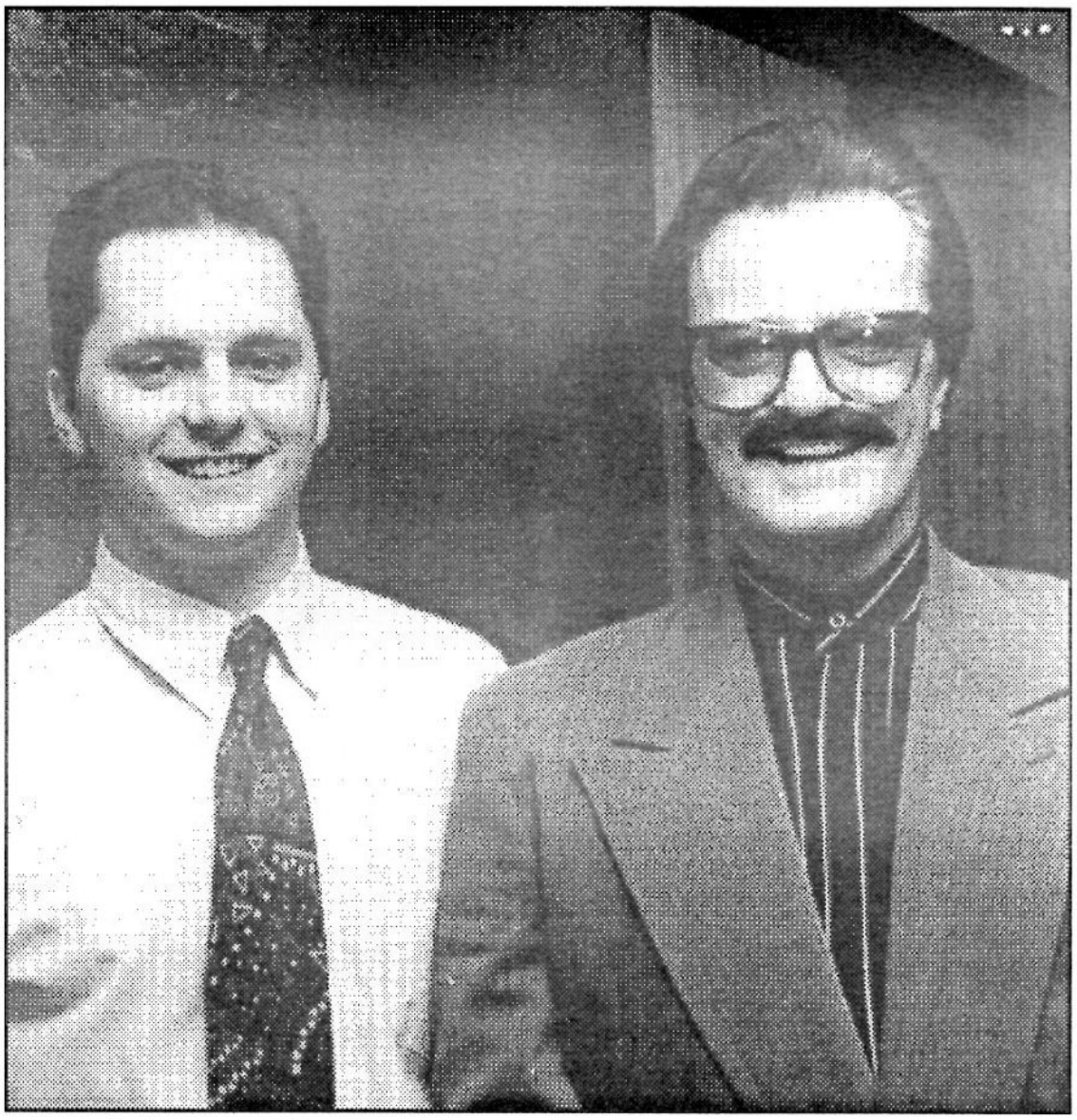
HITCH: Those were of us sitting and talking. I want one of us standing!

Goulet: Oh, all right. From one generation to another *(elbows Rod in stomach)*....Take the photo.

Photographer: What do you want, Rod?

HITCH: What?

Photographer: What do you want me to do? Just you two—



Only one of these men has never had his prostate tickled.

Goulet: Take the picture!

HITCH: Just take a couple of shots and make them good. Make me look better than him.

Goulet: That's easy.

Photographer: Alright.

HITCH: One more.

Photographer: Look at each other or something.

Goulet: I don't wanna look at each other! You're taking the picture so we'll look at you!

Photographer: Look over there. Look at Rod. Go ahead, look at Rod.

(doesn't look; picture taken anyway)

HITCH: Thank you.

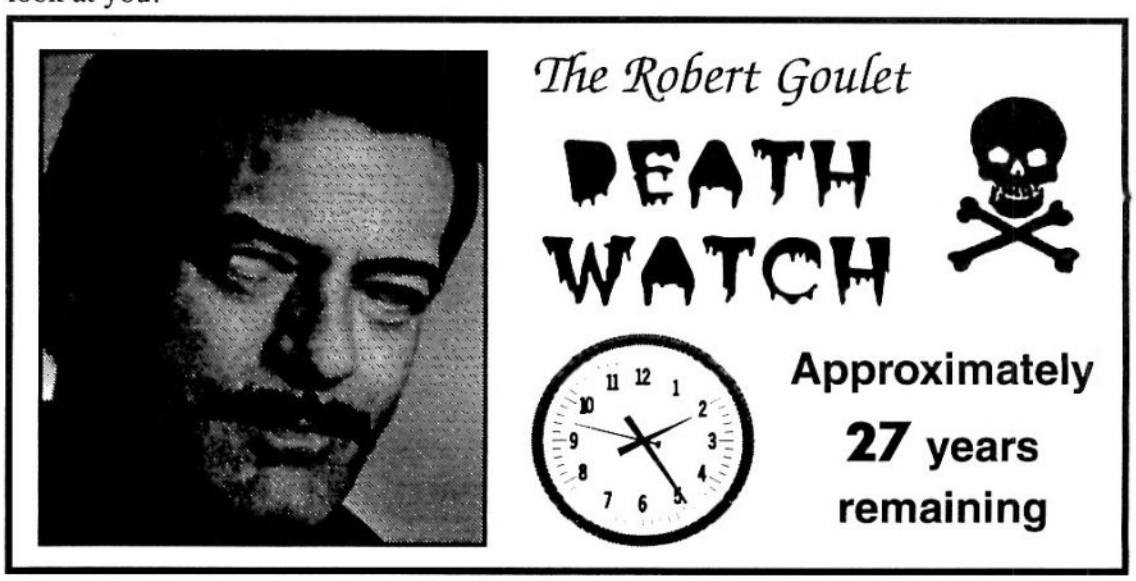
Goulet: Thank you, young man.

HITCH: I really appreciate the interview.

Goulet: My pleasure.

HITCH: We'll get out of your hair now.

Goulet: Yeah.



"Dear Mr. Clipson:"

March 6, 1994

Gilbert Cuellar, Jr.
El Chico's Restaurants
P.O. Box 819017
Dallas, Texas 75381-9939

Dear Gilbert:

As a senior citizen who has enjoyed your family's fine Mexican quazine for many many years now, I have never written to you before. But I deem it necessary.

Last night I took my grandkids Billy and Mary to eat at one of your restarants here. As is our custom when dining at El Chico's we ask the walter to bring the children coloring pages to work on while we wait for our food to arrive. Imagine my horror when our walter brought young Mary her sheet to color! It was the donkey one, she has colored this one many times before but this time someone on your staff had added offensive naughty parts to the donkey and then brought it to my granddaughter. She will be turning 5 soon and I don't wish her to be exposed to this kind of filth until she is old enough.

I have enclosed a copy of the offensive page so you can see what damage has been done to the reputation of El Chico's. I do not think I will be taking my grandkids there again, fearing a repeat of last night's tragic events.

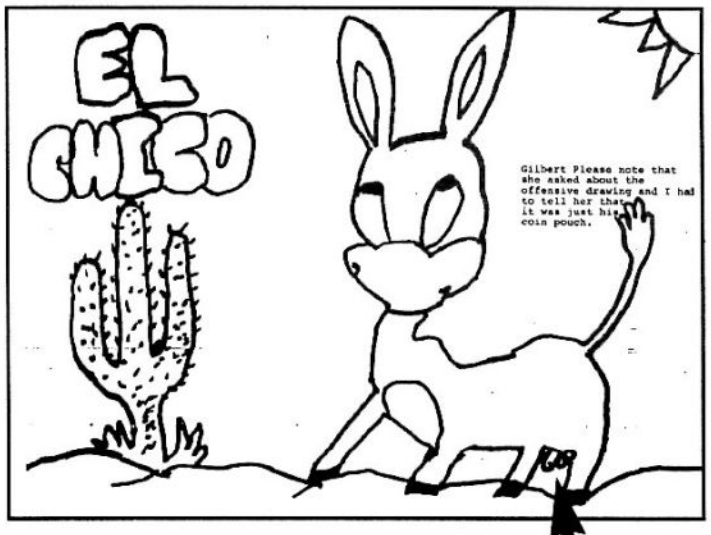
I am also shocked and offended to learn that "El Chico" in English means "the chick." Our walter told us this and I think it is blantantly sexist. You could probably be acccused of sexual harasment.

I hope we can put this incident behind us. What are your thoughts on the matter sir?

Thank you kindly,

Robert C. Clipson

Robert C. Clipson
5504 N. Tulsa
Oklahoma City, Okla. 73112


EL CHICO
Gilbert Please note that she asked about the offensive drawing and I had to tell her that it was just his coin pouch.
LOOK

ELCHICO
Para la familia

March 25, 1994

Mr. Robert Clipson
5504 N. Tulsa
Oklahoma City, OK 73112

Dear Mr. Clipson:

We appreciate you writing to us about your dining experience at our El Chico in Oklahoma City. Please accept our apologies for the unpleasant situation that you experienced.

Our goal is to make sure that you, our guest, are totally satisfied when you come to El Chico. The quality of food and service is designed to ensure this satisfaction. However, in those rare instances when we fall short of your expectations we appreciate the opportunity to both know about it, so we can correct it, and to try to retain you as the valued customer that you are.

I have forwarded your letter to Don Dungy, the Regional Operations Director in Oklahoma City. We did try to make contact with you to determine exactly which restaurant you were given the picture for your granddaughter to color. We are very concerned and embarrassed about the picture and we are doing everything possible to make sure that this situation never happens again.

Please accept the enclosed dinner passes. You are very important to us and we look forward to serving you again soon.

If you ever feel we are falling short again, please do not hesitate to call me at 800-275-1337 extension 156.

Sincerely,

Krissa Parmley

Krissa Parmley
Office of the Chairman

Mr. Clipson—
Please call me at the restaurant. I'd like to find out more about the incident.
I'm sorry for the problems.

Excerpts from David Hasselhoff's

BAYWATCH

Diary

You gotta love our talented cast. I sure do...had sex with all of them.

Pam is so dedicated to the show that she had floatation devices implanted into her chest. Ha! Just kidding. I am a kidder of the first order.

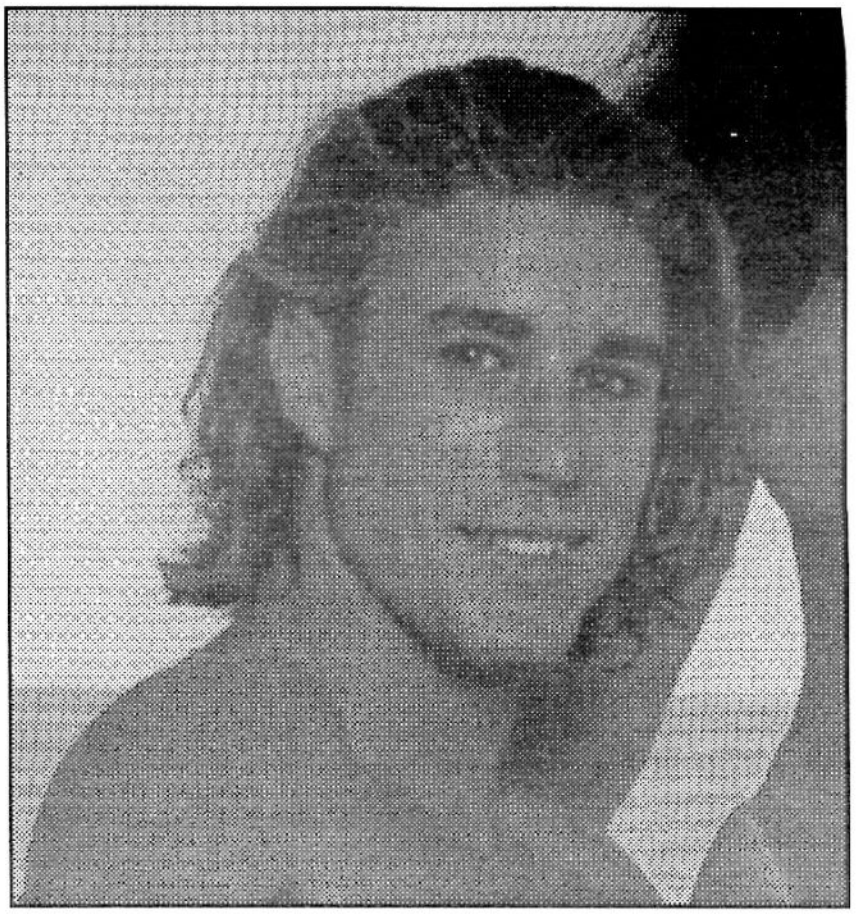
Dear Diary...

Today may not have been a record-setting one temperature-wise, according to the ol' weatherman, but I can assure you it was amongst the warmest in my heart. That I do know.

You see, today was the day we got to film the scene on page 7. The one where I have to run in the water to save the asthmatic boy. Right from the first take, I was on fire. My chest properly oiled, my nipples hard with excitement, my hair coifed to perfection, I ran toward the waves, feeling my buff chest run with me. My legs looked so fine.

The scene worked. Once again, I am God. I love what we do, and what I, specifically, do for the world.

Fondly, Dave



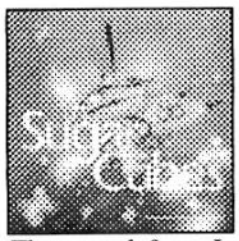
(above left)
At first, it was hard adjusting to having a man as my new partner. Ha! Again, I am kidding! I'm a kidder by trade! So sue me!

(above right)
Whenever Jason needs help or attention on the set, I am there for him. Whether it's a shoulder to cry on or an extra hand or two to aid in changing out of his swim trunks, he knows he can always count on me to be there for him.

(left)
I feel pretty.

We get a lot of criticism about our show, all of which I pooh-pooh. They're just jealous, I say. The level of professionalism amongst our cast remains so high when it comes to acting skills. I happen to believe, with justification of course, that my versatility and range as an actor are no accident to the show's enormous success.

ROCK



The Sugarcubes
The Great Cross-over Potential
(Elektra)

The now-defunct Icelandic band was on the forefront of the alternative rock movement, and like many influentials, can only measure their impact long after their absence. *Crossover Potential* is a long overdue document of the 'Cubes' greatest "hits," even if they made little of a chart splash on these shores. They may be best known for the poppy "Motor Crash," but it's far from their best. More darker numbers like "Birthday" and "Mama" showcase the group at its avant-garde best, while "Regina" really lets loose, with Björk growling in that voice that's 10 times as big as she is. Her occasional male vocal partner chimes in with nonsensical phrases *a la* a North Pole Fred Schneider. The Sugarcubes never did reach the commercial success hinted at in the title, but here's proof that they were better than most who did.

U2
The Best of 1980-1990
(Island)

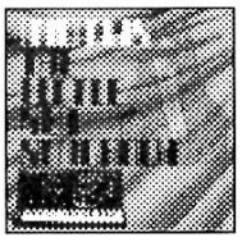
With a band this big, a greatest hits collection was inevitable. Despite daily airplay, I never tire of hearing U2's certified classics like "Bad" or "Pride." The latter-day material like "Angel of Harlem" is just as welcome. Limited editions of this title carry a second disc of B-sides, and even they are grade-A material. "The Sweetest Thing," in particular, brings back of flood of high school memories, and I much prefer the original, stripped-down version to the newly refurbished single; both appear here. Something as delicately beautiful as "Bass Trap" makes me think they should sign on Brian Eno as a fifth member, and "Dancing Barefoot" and "Love Comes Tumbling" help to remind what makes U2 so good in the first place. Though success has brought them exposure and security, they have somewhat lost their ability to surprise. Listening to these lost tracks serves to reclaim part of that asset.

Fear of Pop
Volume 1
(Sony)

Oh, that nutty Ben Folds. He takes a break from his band with a half-assed collection of half-baked songs and other ideas, that's only about half good. Throwaways are called throwaways for a reason, and some in-

Disc O Disk

jokes should just remain in-jokes. But a few cuts allow the Folds knack to shine through the murk. Having certified ham Bill Shatner speak-sing on "In Love" may be a move that elicits many a snicker, but it's a damn fine song. You may laugh at the old Captain's delivery, but you cannot deny the marvelous melody sneaking around underneath.



Momus
The Little Red Songbook
(Cherry Red)

Inspired by equal parts Wendy Carlos and Dr. Robert Moog, the merry Scottish prankster known as Momus dishes out a conceptual batch of "analogue baroque." The classical-music-with-futuristic-instruments approach isn't new, but it isn't worn out, either. In fact, it's put to top-notch use with several cuts here, including the openers of "Old Friend, New Flame" and "MC Escher." Known for his ironic lyrical knack, Momus' songwriting does not disappoint, although he does go too far on occasion ("Coming in a Girl's Mouth," anyone?). Sometimes frivolous, other times forced, this successful *Songbook* is largely a winner. For added fun, check out the extra helping of karaoke tracks at the disc's end, as well as one hidden song.

Pure Moods II
(Virgin)

The good? Massive Attack, Craig Armstrong. The bad? George Benson, Loreena McKennitt. The ugly? One word: Yanni. Ever hear of consistency? The compilers of the sequel to the smash-hit *Pure Moods* (which was good) certainly haven't. And when you have to dig as far back as 1976 to fill your disc, maybe you should have called it quits with volume one.

Dovetail Joint
001
(Columbia)

In one of those local music success stories that rarely happens anymore, Chicago-area band Dovetail Joint found itself propelled to the big time when a radio station starting playing a song, and it spread like wildfire. That song – now in a finished, released form – is "Level on the Inside," a buoyant, catchy single seemed destined for summertime mix tapes on both coasts. Like the rest of their debut, *001*, it's hard-driving power pop that doesn't fail to pack harmonies in between the waves of guitars. The band cites Led Zeppelin as an influence, but you can hear snatches of everyone from The Smithereens to Nirvana. Theirs may not be an original sound, but it's a fine one.

Buck-O-Nine
Libido
(TVT)

Thankfully, the dreaded ska revival seems to have played itself out, so now bands like Reel Big Fish can return to their rightful place in oblivion. Meanwhile, acts like Buck-O-Nine will live on, having always had ska as *part* of their sound, but never to exploit it. Top 40 radio may have eluded them, but longevity will be theirs. The band further branches out into ballads and beach sounds, with hints of Calypso here and there. It may not totally live up to the excitedness suggested by the title, but it's not for a lack of trying.

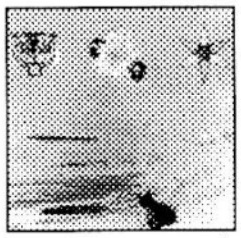
John Wesley Harding
Trad Arr Jones
(Zero Hour)

For the follow-up to his highly accessible *Awake*, Wes goes totally uncommerical with an album covering the songs of folk legend Nic Jones. That's the sign of a true artist. Laid-back and quiet, the album is very much in the restrained style of *New Deal*, the record he did for Rhino, with the music sort of taking a back seat to the powerful vocals – commanding without being loud. On standout cuts like "The Golden Glove" or "The Singer's Request," there's no denying you can't find a better male vocalist today than Wes. (Or a songwriter, for that matter, but he's given up those duties here.) Wes' fans will embrace it, as they do all his work, and folkies should enjoy the careful touch (and electric guitar) Wes brings to a celebrated body of work.

Steve Wynn
My Midnight
(Zero Hour)

Obviously talented but criminally underestimated, Steve Wynn has carved out a name for himself this decade with a series of smart LPs that went nowhere saleswise but impressed those who did buy. My hope is *My Midnight* finds a wider audience, because it's among Wynn's best. An uptempo rocker, the album is a welcome helping of scrappy, well-written pop. "Cats and Dogs" is particularly lively in an unassuming

way; if it bore the name of a household artist, it'd be a hit single. "Mandy Breakdown" makes fine use of a string section in a song that recalls a nursery rhyme gone horribly awry. Incredibly pleasant, melodically rich, it's an album to smile by.



The Beta Band
The Three E.P.'s

(Astralwerks)

Presumably from nowhere – Scotland, really – The Beta Band has emerged to knock me on my tired ass with a singularly spectacular debut (even if it is an assemblage of three previously released mini-albums). Near impossible to categorize, it's all over the place, but not a mess. What begins as a trip-hop groove quickly turns into an acoustic guitar assault before exploding into an epiphany of percussion. As the songs trail out past the five-minute mark, you start to notice the more electronic, Tortoise-like flourishes that pepper the outstanding dark melodies, transporting you everywhere from the Mexican border to the rings of Saturn. Why we haven't heard about something this brilliant until now is why you owe it to yourself to discover this release, certainly atop an eclectic best-of list for the year thus far.

Mission Accomplished, Too
More Themes for Spies and Cops

(Hip-O)

Know what the secret weapon of a spy is? It's not a Luger, a car with an ejection seat or a shaken martini – it's the Hammond organ, and there's a surplus of it on this second collection of private eye themes of the '60s and '70s. With the Ventures doing *Hawaii Five-O* and *The Streets of San Francisco*, you know you're in good hands. Al Caiola takes on *The Mod Squad*, while Lalo Schifrin offers his laid-back *Bullitt* theme. Taking the genre into the next millennium are acid-jazz artists James Taylor Quartet and Snowboy, covering *Starsky and Hutch* and *The New Avengers*, respectively. There's even a disco-fied version of Rhythm Heritage's "Theme from *S.W.A.T.*"

Psycho
Music from and Inspired by the Motion Picture

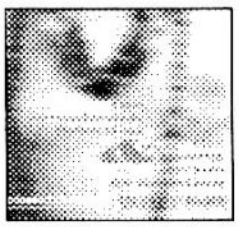
(Geffen)

With a solid, unifying theme, *Psycho* had one of '98's best soundtracks. Danny Elfman appears on three tracks, adapting Bernard Hermann's original score – one of the best and most recognizable in film history. In addition, Hermann's eerie melodies are sampled in four songs by modern artists. Hip-hopper Howie B. offers a great groove instrumental called "Once Is Not Enough," wrapped around a goofy dialogue snippet of Vince Vaughn saying, "The kitchen's awful homey." For fans of alt-country, there's Steve Earle and Teddy Thompson (son of Richard); James Hall tones things down even further with an acoustic cover of Talking Heads' "Psycho Killer," which benefits from his sounding eerily like David Byrne. The rest of the album is comprised of electronica cuts from trip-hop outfit Thievery Corporation, Lionrock and Mono, who walk away with best-of honors with "Madhouse." Only Rob Zombie's metallic noise of "Living Dead Girl" – the album's single – mars this otherwise standout cash-in.

Teletubbies
The Album

(Kid Rhino)

You probably think the highest praise I can give this album is something like, "Well, my 15-month-old son loves it." And he does. But his dad kinda digs it, too. The infant-aimed Teletubbies represent the most repetitive, patience-testing programming on TV today, but without all the trippy visuals, the music stands out as not bad ... at all! Much of it is ambient, New Agey numbers, but others are filled with weird, electronic noises that make it totally distanced from other kiddie garbage. This is not to say that the song lengths don't occasionally go overboard; "Dirty Knees" in particular is so stuck in a loop that you'll be searching for Philip Glass' name in the liner notes. "Teletubbies Say 'Eh-Oh!'" actually bumped the Spice Girls off the #1 spot on the UK charts; no real surprise since it's an uptempo dance number that *sounds* like the Spice Girls ... at 78 rpm. To increase chances of enjoyment, play around with the ventricular cover while you listen to this. The sight of those creepy things cutting loose is, admittedly, infectious.



The Crippled Companion
The Soundtrack Generation

(Crippled Dick Hot Wax!)

I can really only recommend half of this German label sampler, which collects soundtrack cuts from its series of sleazy film music, including *Schoolgirl Report*, *Beat at Cinecitta* and the legendary *Vampyros Lesbos*, as well as two spy cuts from Peter Thomas. The second half, however, is a mishmash of modern bands of questionable talent – NYC underground fixture Lydia Lunch among them – that seem to have no link from one to another ... other than that they bite down hard. But at under $10 domestic, you really can't feel shorted, as the first half is just that strong, and offers a fine taste of several soundtrack collections you'll want to get. QDK Media's *Music for Gracious Living* sampler (see **HITCH** 19) had the same disadvantages ... and pleasures.

Bombay the Hard Way
Guns, Cars & Sitars

(Motel)

Crime films from "Bollywood" serve as the source material for this collection of swingin' funky themes. Despite ridiculous titles conjuring up every Indian cliché in the book ("Fists of Curry," "Punjabis, Pimps & Players"), the album offers a look at a whole new genre of film music formerly unknown to these parts. Of course, it's heavily influenced by American funk, but with an added dash of sitars, the exotic level rises.

Sci-Fi's Greatest Hits
Volume 4: Defenders of Justice

(TVT)

BAM! POW! BIFF! Some 37 superhero themes from film and TV are rounded up into one muscle-bound package presented by The Sci-Fi Channel. From Danny Elfman's *Batman* score to the campy show's Neal Hefti theme, *Justice* does justice to the entire genre. Among the guilty pleasures to be had include themes from *Speed Racer*, *The Amazing Spider-Man*, *Knight Rider* and *RoboCop*, not to mention John Carpenter's oddly effective title cut from *Escape from New York*. I'd rather have the cheese-techno *Mortal Kombat* theme than the lifeless George S. Clinton orchestral number here, but I'll live. As part of a four-disc series, other *Greatest Hits* volumes focus on space travel, alien threats and horror.

The Avengers & Other Top Sixties TV Themes

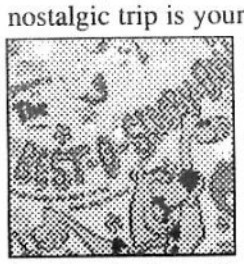
(Sequel)

A British-borne cash-in for the flop film, *The Avengers & Other Top Sixties TV Themes* houses an appropriate 60 teletunes. Laurie Johnson's *Avengers* theme comes first, and it sounds as brilliant as ever. The cuts that follow range from magnificent to magically atrocious, with artists like Tony Hatch and Barry Gray comprising a bulk of the artist roster. The other standouts include themes from *The Saint*, *Thunderbirds* and ... well, everything that you can find on Castle's budget-priced *Top TV Themes* disc (see **HITCH** 18), in just 18 cuts! Clearly, 60 is overkill.

The Best of Schoolhouse Rock

(Rhino)

Nothing but the best from ABC's enduring Saturday-morning educational shorts have been boiled down to one compact collection from Rhino's four-disc series. Yep, "I'm Just a Bill" is here. So is "Conjunction Junction." Same for "Unpack Your Adjectives" (my personal fave). Seventeen tracks in all – some digitally remastered – with lyrics lovingly printed. If at one point in your childhood, your hero was zero or you lusted after Interplanet Janet, this nostalgic trip is yours for the taking.



Best-O-Scooby-Doo!

(Kid Rhino)

A five-song sampler of the current *Scooby-Doo's Snack Tracks* (reviewed last issue), *Best-O* is a premium item offered by SpaghettiOs in exchange for four labels. For those wanting a peek at the full-length disc, the *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You!* theme is here, preceded by a cheesy intro from "DJ Theo," aka the cartoon mascot on the SpaghettiOs can. A real steal if, like me, you can get your infant child to consume the necessary crap.

Cartoon Network
Toon-a-Rama

(Flashback)

Cartoon Network
Groovin' Toons

(Flashback)

Themes from *The Jetsons*, *The Flintstones* and *Scooby-Doo* are collected alongside *Space Ghost*, *Hong Kong Phooey* and *Jonny Quest* in two separate 24-track compilations, each priced at an unbelievably low $5.99. If you like cartoon music, they are a must-own.

SWANK

More Songs from the Burt Bacharach Songbook

(Varése Vintage)

Following closely on the heels of the lauded *The Burt Bacharach Songbook*, this second collection unearths 16 more nuggets of Bacharach covers. Overall, it's a more satisfying compilation than its wonderful predecessor. Seminal interpretations like B.J. Thomas' "Raindrops Keep Fallin' on My Head" and Gene Pitney's "Twenty Four Hours from Tulsa" are included in all their splendor, as well as lesser-known gems like Chuck Jackson's jazzy "Any Day Now" and Issac Hayes' "Walk on By" (which was heavily sampled by Hooverphonic on "2Wicky"). Only Bobby Darin – of all people – turns in a truly perfunctory performance that feels oddly stilted next to the energy displayed by his fellow artists – not the least of whom is Burt himself, closing the album with his instrumental of "(There's) Always Something There to Remind Me."

Cal Tjader
Sounds Out Burt Bacharach

(DCC Compact Classics)

On this budget reissue, the man responsible for whipping up "Soul Sauce" applies his Latin jazz stylings to a select number of pop classics from the Bacharach/David canon. "Walk on By" and "Anyone Who Had a Heart" appear on almost every Bacharach compilation or tribute, but Tjader also digs deeper for lesser-known works like "Moneypenny Goes for Broke" (from *Casino Royale*) and "My Little Red Book."

Ultradolce
Cosmo Exotic 'Orea' Sextease Party

(Irma La Douce)

Arrriva La Bomba
The Easiest Italian Party of the Year

(Irma La Douce)

How's *that* for a subtitle? Following up its *Cocktail Shaker* comp, Irma further explores new-lounge territories with 18 of the breeziest Italian easy tunes it can muster. Weighing more heavily on the dance-floor side than its predecessor, *Ultradolce* may not have as broad of an appeal, but those who get this

8 that were great in '98

albums

1. Air – *Moon Safari* (Source/Caroline)
2. Mercury Rev – *Deserter's Songs* (V2)
3. The Notwist – *Shrink* (Zero Hour)
4. John Wesley Harding – *Awake* (Zero Hour)
5. Propellerheads – *Decksanddrums-androckandroll* (DreamWorks)
6. Oranj Symphonette – *The Oranj Album* (Rykodisc)
7. *Algebra Spaghetti* (Siesta)
8. The High Llamas – *Cold and Bouncy* (V2)

reissues

1. Burt Bacharach – *The Look of Love: The Burt Bacharach Collection* (Rhino)
2. Stereolab – *Aluminum Tunes* (Drag City)
3. Burt Bacharach – *Plays His Hits*
4. The Peter Thomas Sound Orchestra – *Futuremusik* (Scamp)
5. The Sugarcubes – *The Great Crossover Potential* (Elektra)
6. Pizzicato Five – *Remix Album: Happy End of You* (Matador)
7. Burt Bacharach – *Make It Easy on Yourself* (A&M)
8. Pixies – *At the BBC* (Elektra)

soundtracks

1. *Out of Sight* (MCA)
2. *Lost in Space* (TVT)
3. *Psycho* (Geffen)
4. *The Avengers* (Atlantic)
5. *Mission Accomplished, Too: More Themes for Spies and Cops* (Hip-O)
6. *Permanent Midnight* (Geffen)
7. *Boogie Nights #2* (Capitol)
8. *Classic Game Show Themes* (Varése Vintage)

party are the elite that don't have to wait behind the velvet rope of hipness. The fabulous Montefiori Cocktail checks in with two tracks. Of similar sounds are standout outfits Hammond Express, Maccaroni Circus and Ohm Guru. *Arrriva*, meanwhile, collects swank tunes from yesteryear – all Italian, mostly covers. Giorgio Moroder does "Mah Na Mah Na," while Christy coos the delectable "Deep Down," the Morricone-penned theme to *Danger: Diabolik*, worth the cover price alone.

Easy Tempo Experience
A New Cinematic Perspective
(Right Tempo)

Today's artists twist the knobs of some classic Italian film music, bringing the sultry sounds of yesterday into tomorrow. Not surprisingly, the highlights come from the better-known acts – the Karminsky Experience Inc. tackles "Mah Na Mah Na," while the High Llamas work their bubbly magic with "Lady Magnolia." Kid Loco, Maffia Sound System and Jazz Brothers stand out as well.

Burt Bacharach
One Amazing Night
(N2K)

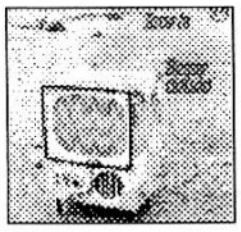
Last spring's cable tribute was recorded for posterity, and most of it is worth multiple listens. Elvis Costello brought down the house with "God Give Me Strength" and "This House Is Empty," but the latter has been left off this souvenir – I'd much rather have lost All Saints' tired contribution. Mike Myers' "What's New, Pussycat?" isn't nearly as fun without the visuals, but Wynonna benefits, forcing you to hear a fine vocal performance of "Anyone Who Had a Heart," rather than marvel at her increasing weight. For nostalgia's sake, Dionne Warwick's medley is hard to beat, but from a sheer standpoint of musical power, Ben Folds Five takes the cake with a blistering rendition of "Raindrops Keep Falling on My Head." The master himself closes with "Alfie."

The Free Design
Kites Are Fun: The Best of Free Design
(Varése Vintage)

The long-forgotten – if ever known at all – soft-pop group The Free Design finds its most easy-pleasin' moments rounded up for an overdue best-of collection. Though better known on other continents, Free Design hailed from The Big Apple. Its sound, however, was decidedly European, with soft but high-pitched vocals floating atop quiet, butterfly melodies. Their biggest hit, "Kites Are Fun," was remade for 1997's *Songs for the Jet Set*, and we can now see just how reverent the cover was; it remains a fantastic "lost" single that deftly captures an innocence that was in rare supply during its time (as the '60s met the '70s). They even have the balls to cover that most admired of all easypop classics, Francis Lai's "A Man and a Woman" ... in English!

Blue Movies
Scoring for the Studios
Blue Bacharach
A Cooler Shaker
The Blue Series Sampler
The Ultimate Mixer from Blue Note
(Blue Note)

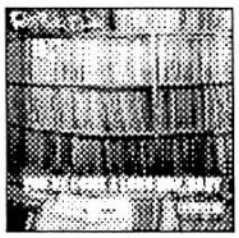
To celebrate its 60th anniversary, Blue Note – the giant of all jazz labels – has issued a series of budget-priced compilations of varying themes, all intended to give the casual listener a remedial course in the one true American-born art form. A mildly successful collection of jazz artists performing film music greats, the amusingly titled *Blue Movies* offers a suspect rendition for every great one. One on hand, you have Bobby Hutcherson's "Blow Up!," Billy May's "Mission: Impossible" or Lee Morgan's sublime "Midnight Cowboy." And then you have fairly lifeless interps of themes from *M*A*S*H*, *Kojak* and *Star Trek* – but not the theme; just some random cut to whom no songwriter is credited. *Blue Bacharach*, it goes without saying, covers the work of Burt, also to mixed success. Stanley Turrentine impresses most with his down-tempo takes on "Walk on By" and "This Guy's in Love with You." For a sampling of cuts from these and seven of the other *Blue* albums (*Afro Blue* and *Blue Break Beats* among them), the $4.98 *Blue Series Sampler* is an excellent starting point, particularly for Margo Thunders' cover of "Expressway to Your Heart," every bit as rousing as her last name suggests.



Benny Golson
Tune in, Turn on to the Hippest Commercials of the Sixties
(Verve)

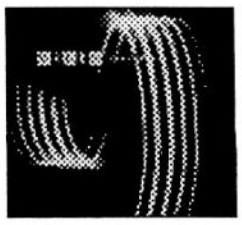
A reissue of the bandleader's 1967 album, *Tune in, Turn on* is comprised of lounge-jazz covers of popular television commercial jingles of the day. And by "jingles," we don't mean some piffy "You'll wonder where the yellow went when you brush your teeth with Pepsodent" line, but true songs. For example, the enduring "Music to Watch Girls By" was written for Pepsi-Cola, and here, Golson and company take the fizz out of it for a relaxed, but fun, rendering. "No Matter What Shape (Your Stomach's In)" has been covered by many – including The Ventures – but it was used to hock Alka-Seltzer. Not *all* of the dozen tracks were ads – Elmer Bernstein's "The Magnificent Seven" was and still is one of cinema's finest themes – but the TV-dinner treatment it gets places it in fine company. Golson seems to make no bones about his record – the kind of concept album that no one has the guts to make anymore: unapologetic fun, and nothing else.

WIRED



Fatboy Slim
You've Come a Long Way, Baby
(Astralwerks/Caroline)

Or, the second album from a guy who will *always* have a better record collection than you. And your friends. Put together. Though not quite as gripping as his popular debut – *Better Living through Chemistry* – the just-as-naughty *Baby* is satisfying through and through. In this outing, Slim shows a heavier soul influence, which works quite well in his epic collages of sonic genius. Much has already been written about the first single, "The Rockafella Skank," but suffice to say, it merits some more ink: The song just kicks ass, reliably each and every time. "Praise You," the second single, is a moving, utterly uplifting mix of gospel-infused greatness. Only "You're Not from Brighton," too far into rap for comfort, is a candidate for excision.



Wired Magazine Presents
Music Futurists
(Rhino)

Fifteen of music's most innovative and ahead-of-their-time artists are celebrated on this unique compilation from the future-thinking periodical. Organized chronologically from the late '50s to present day, *Music Futurists* showcases musicians as diverse as lounge father Esquivel and noted loser Beck. Looking at the music that was created between these two, however, the association seems quite logical and not so far removed. In an album filled with fantastic performances, a few stand out

as utterly sublime. Steve Reich has the minimalist thing down to an artful science with the oddly affecting "Pulse," while Brian Eno's "2/1" is a stellar cut from his landmark *Music for Airports* album. Closing the record is Ben Neill's staggeringly beautiful and cinematic interpretation of Neil Young's "After the Gold Rush." Trust me, you won't recognize Young's song; Neill makes it all his trumpet-drenched own – an atmospheric and ultimately heartbreaking masterpiece. Other highlights come from Sun Ra, Tangerine Dream, Todd Rundgren and Godley & Creme, here with their great, lost '80s song "Cry." Even artists who aren't my usual cup of tea – like Devo and Sonic Youth – are represented with above-average cuts. Even with the diversity on display – as the excellent liner notes relay – *Music Futurists* is one to be embraced as an album full of discoveries.

Burger/Ink
Las Vegas

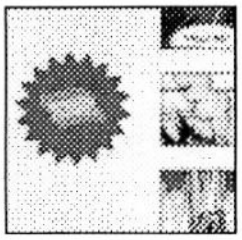
(Matador)

The Belgian duo of Joerg Burger and Mike Ink have taken a truly laid-back approach to ambient trance with their trip *Las Vegas*. Assuredly slow, each song builds instrument upon instrument on its own sweet time, resulting in melodic experiments that make quite an impact with their soft hushes. "Elvism" in particular, is a beautiful piece of electronic pop, allowing the faintest hint of a steel drum to bleed through to the top. The production is so subtle that you don't realize what you're hearing until it's already gone, making *Vegas* a nice antidote to the in-your-face noise that often crowds the bins where albums like this sit. If you were driving to Sin City just before the break of dawn, and you needed a soundtrack for that exact moment when the neon bursts over the hill, look no further.

Grooverider
Mysteries of Funk

(Columbia)

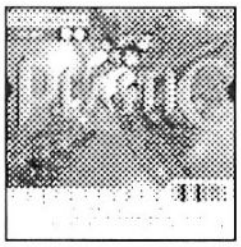
The godfather of drum-and-bass (as the media have dubbed him), Grooverider has been influential on the scene for years, yet he never got around to making an album of his own ... until now. The wait was worthwhile. His *Mysteries of Funk* is a cosmic tableau of '70s soul and *Star Trek* samples, radiating otherworldly vibes from start to finish. "Cybernetic Jazz," "Starbase 23" and "Time & Space" best capture the loose but intentional outer-space theme. As is the case with Massive Attack, Grooverider sometimes enlists the vocal help of female singers to complement the instrumentation, and those pulling duty here are appropriately on the same astral plane (see "Rainbows of Colour").



Wagon Christ
Tally Ho!

(Astralwerks/Caroline)

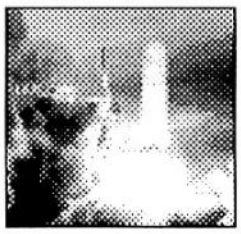
Luke Vibert's Wagon Christ *nom de plume* is one that allows him to experiment in any musical genre he wishes, from laid-back trip hop to funktified drum 'n' bass, thrown in a blender with a dash of dialogue snippets, cartoon sound effects and unusual noises. It should come as no surprise that Vibert is somewhat of a musical jokester – who else would name one of his slowest tracks "Crazy Disco Party"? – but his product is not to be classified as novelty. Though his ingredients are eclectic, it all comes out of the oven with a cooked-to-perfection melody.



Plastic Compilation
Volume 02

(Nettwerk)

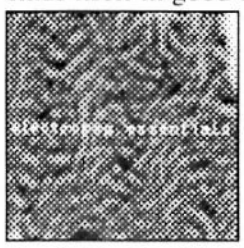
A fairly cohesive collection from start to finish, the second *Plastic Compilation* sports tracks from heavyweights The Crystal Method, William Orbit (who recently worked wonders with Madonna) and Sarah McLachlan (as remixed by Roni Size). The Chemical Brothers work their magic with Spiritualized's "I Think I'm in Love," but Norman Cook (aka Fatboy Slim) steals the show with his now-classic hyperdrive mix of Cornershop's "Brimful of Asha."



The Orb
U.F. Off: The Best of The Orb

(Island)

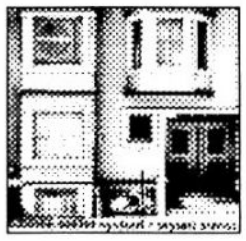
Three-man electronica outfit The Orb arguably is best known for "Little Fluffy Clouds," now playing on a VW commercial near you. Its bubbly beat with snatches of Joni Mitchell waxing poetic about all things cumulonimbus is one of electronic music's finest singles. The rest of this "hits" collection shows The Orb has plenty of other tricks up their sleeve, notably the high-octane rush of "Toxygene," the reggae-dub of "Perpetual Dawn" and the slow-but-sure "A Huge Evergrowing Pulsating Brain That Rules from the Centre of the Ultraworld" (*whew!*), which begins with a high female voice warbling lines from that AC staple "Lovin' You." As is standard operating procedure with such compilations, a new song has been tacked on – "Mickey Mars" – and it finds itself in good company.



Electropop Essentials

(Hip-O)

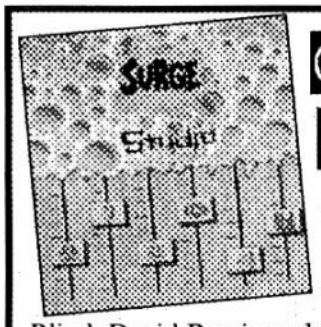
Long live the digital-minded '80s! Like a scrappy cousin to Hip-O's *Synth Me Up: 14 Classic Electronic Hits* – you know the kind, with dyed streaks of hair and androdgynous looks – *Electropop* is as aptly titled as any album. This thing *celebrates* that assembly-line approach to rock music, from some of the decade's most popular – Yello's "Oh Yeah" – to its most influential (such as Kraftwerk's "Showroom Dummies"). Bonus points go to the label for not fronting the obvious cuts; Wall of Sound is represented with "Can't Make Love" instead of "Mexican Radio," Soft Cell finds "Tainted Love" foregone in favor of "Sex Dwarf." Plus, when's the last time you saw Wire, Magazine or Japan on *any* compilation? Anyone?



Dubtribe Sound System
Bryant St.

(Jive Electro)

The free-form groove spirit is alive and doing quite well, thank you, in the Dubtribe's first album in three years. Neither rock nor electronica, the music of Dubtribe utilizes machinery in the most non-mechanical ways, if that makes any sense at all. Just give it a listen and you'll find yourself swept away in a hip-hop happy hippie vibe. The dozen songs on *Bryant St.* flow one right into the other with unnoticed ease, making for a non-stop, 72-minute romp on the green grass. Largely instrumental, the album does throw in vocals on the later



Curious Promo Disc of the Moment

Surge Studio

(Capitol)

While this free disc offers tracks from Fatboy Slim, Third Eye Blind, David Bowie and Moby, it also serves as an "enhanced CD (that allows you to mix) super sonics across the full electromagnetic spectrum" simply by inserting it into your personal computer. So not only do you get seven songs to work with, but a library of other Surge-related samples, such as the sound of a soft drink opening or some punk skater kid screaming *"SURRRRRGE!"* Such a gimmick – even to promote the sickly "fully loaded citrus drink" – is nifty, except that the disk *doesn't fucking work!*

tracks, notably in "Ain't Gonna Do You No Good," in which the Tommy Hilfiger crowd gets dissed, and the political "Holler!" This is one for repeat summer listening, coming a blessed quarter early.

Old School vs. New School

(Jive Electro)

The new Jive Electro label has been inaugurated with this collection, digging deep (and not-so-deep) into the Jive vaults for a slew of hip-hop tracks for today's electronica artists to remix. Most of the disc finds rap forefathers Whodini and Kool Moe Dee worked over by the likes of The Freestylers and DJ Icey. But there are three great reasons to get this disc. One is Norman Cook's (Fatboy Slim) remix of A Tribe Called Quest's "I Left My Wallet in El Segundo" – put simply, this guy can't do a bad remix, and this one is given a spaghetti Western wash. Two and three are remixes of The Stone Roses classic "Fools Gold," performed by Grooverider and Rabbit in the Moon. For some, messing with "Gold" is akin to Gus Van Sant doing Hitchcock, but the result here is music to my ears.

Paris Is Sleeping Respect Is Burning
Volume 2

(Astralwerks)

Cassius
1999

(Astralwerks)

Get ready for the resurgence of house. Thanks to the French, the dance genre is coming back (and *big*), and while it may not top our *Billboard* charts, its profile is about to be raised significantly. Coming from the Parisian club Respect is *Respect Is Burning: Volume 2*, a sophomore collection of the latest house hits. This hip collection will garner most of its attention from the inclusion of Stardust's worldwide (the States excepted) smash, "Music Sounds Better with You" (a song *so* huge that *Muzik* magazine's year-end disc of anthems banned it). As remixed here by lounge-friendly Dimitri from Paris, "Music" remains a great anthem about the simple pleasures of love and music – and the exquisite merging of the two. Les Rythmes Digitales and We in Music help comprise the rest of the booty-shakin' lineup. If it all starts to sound like the same, it means one of two things: This music is not for you, or you'd have a hell of a time at Respect. No stranger to Respect's dance floor is Cassius, who debut with the full-length *1999*. The duo behind Cassius have recorded under other monikers, most notably Daft Punk and Motorbass (with the latter mixing the boards on Norma Jean Bell's "I'm the Baddest Bitch" on *Respect 2*), but this may be the one to front. *1999* is house music with an edge. Oh, you could dance to it, all right, but it goes easy on the clubby sound in favor of more adventurous territory. "Chase," for instance is like an homage to '70s TV funk, followed by the self-explanatory "Foxxy" and the otherworldly "Planetz." They even dare to kick the record off with their own theme song – "Cassius 1999" – but it's a memorable and appropriate one. The Bee Gees, meanwhile, will be pleased as punch to hear "Mister Eveready." While they lack the genius of an Air that keeps them from transcending to greater heights, Cassius is doing just fine on its own plane, thank you very much. And that's probably all they were shooting for anyway.

MISC

DAMAGED Hearing
Volume One

(DAMAGED Magazine)

Not a disc but a cassette, *DAMAGED Hearing* – an offshoot of the irregularly published pop-culture zine – is a homemade compilation of "aural oddities and messed-up music for freaks and fanboys from fucked-up films." Hey, that's what it says right on the cover. What this means is funky music from cult flicks like *Alleycat Rock: Sex Hunter*, *The Last Days of Planet Earth* and the always-welcome Don "No Soul" Simmons selections from *Amazon Women on the Moon*. The tape is programmed as if it were a drive-in souvenir: There are introductions, trailers (for *Brainsmasher: A Love Story* and *The Fighting Black Kings*) and snippets of dialogue (from *Switchblade Sisters* and TV's *COPS*, among others). With a wide variety of carefully chosen source music, it's a lot of fun for any B-movie fanatic, and certainly affordable. See the ad elsewhere in issue for ordering information.

WORLD

Paris Combo

(Tinder)

At first glance a modern lounge outfit, Paris Combo actually is band eager to undertake any musical style, whether that be Spanish, American or (what an idea!) French. The LP begins with "On N'a Pas Besoin," which one instantly identifies with France. Same with "Les Portes de L'Ennui" or "Irénée" – not incidentally, the best cuts. Songs on which the band experiments with styles clearly not their own cause the record to lose its luster. Just because it's sung in French doesn't mean it is.

Ned Sublette
Cowboy Rumba

(Rykodisc)

Cuban music meets country and western in this bizarre and not entirely successful amalgamation. The idea here is that songs one would associate with the West are set to frisky Latin beats. Given the record begins with a cover of "Ghost Riders in the Sky," I'm not sure this isn't all a joke. There's no denying that the Latin sounds are the real thing, but fronting it with cowboy vocals is too odd a pairing. Curious, but it mixes like vinegar and water.

Kali
Francofaune

(Tinder)

Francofaune? Did somebody sneeze? Actually, the record is one of lively reggae from the Caribbean, drawing influences from both the traditional and contemporary elements of the genre. "Brother Bob" provides as fine a glimpse as any as to Kali's spirit, but "Doubout an Soley La" works just as well.

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COOL AND STRANGE MUSIC! Magazine
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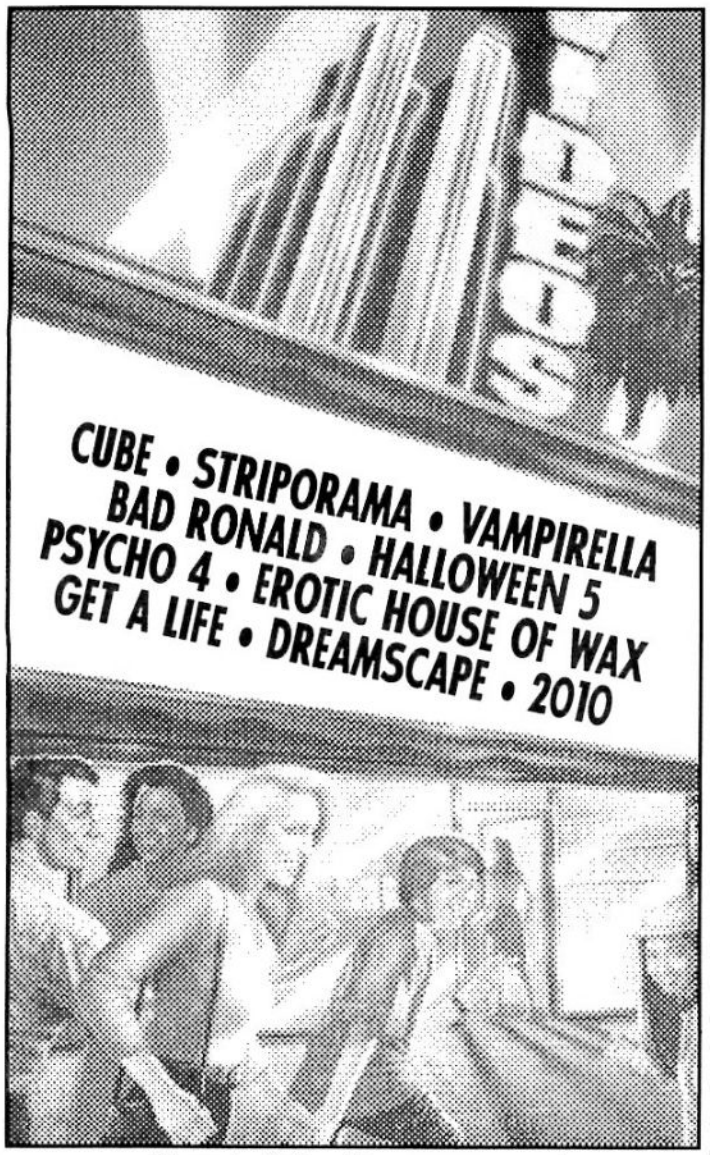


Planet of the Apes
(1968)
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment
★★★★★

Beneath the Planet of the Apes
(1970)
★★★★★

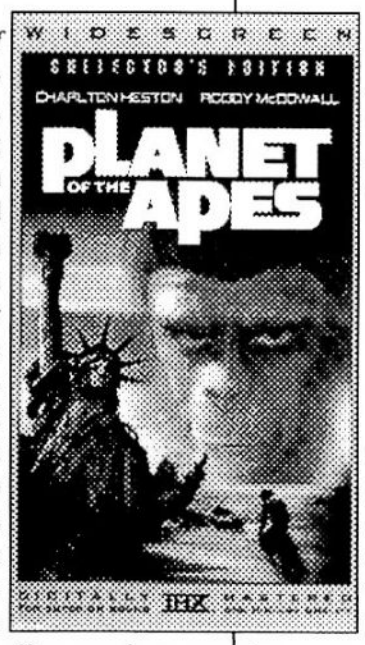
Escape from the Planet of the Apes
(1971)
★★★★★

Conquest of the Planet of the Apes
(1972)
★★★★☆

Battle for the Planet of the Apes
(1973)
★★★★☆

Influential *and* underrated, the five-film *Planet of the Apes* series stands as one of the best sagas in science-fiction history. In my book, it's every bit as good as the *Star Wars* films. Smart without being technical and literate without being nerdy, the *Apes* movies fuse entertainment with a brave mix of pointed social satire and commentary.

It all began with the original *Planet of the Apes*, in which American astronaut Charlton Heston finds himself crash-landed in a futuristic land where apes rule supreme and humans are their slaves. Because he can talk, Heston's Taylor is considered to be both a remarkable specimen and a valid threat to their existence. Befriended by married chimps Cornelius and Zira (Roddy McDowall and Kim Hunter), Taylor is eventually freed and allowed to journey toward "the Forbidden Zone," where he makes a startling discovery that results in one of the best – if not *the* best – shock endings in Hollywood history. An idea of co-scripter Rod Serling, the ending stops my heart every time, and really proves how powerful Franklin J. Schaffner's direction is, which went unnoticed amidst all the great makeup. Of course, this achievement led to you accepting the apes as true characters (rather than men in monkey suits), thus paving the way for four hit sequels.



Beneath the Planet of the Apes takes more of a B-movie angle than the first, and exploits the ending gimmick to the hilt with an entire underground sequence that leads to an isolated cave of mutants in possession of a nuclear warhead. The hero this time is James Franciscus, a fellow astronaut sent to find Taylor (who disappears at this film's beginning), also doomed to a destiny he's not ready to face. With the mutant plot introduced, the apes actually have little screen time, but the film suffers no damage from this omission. It's still a compelling and satisfying adventure, with another appropriate downbeat ending.

Cornelius and Zira manage to flee the fate suffered by their peers via a wormhole in time that throws them onto modern-day Earth in *Escape from the Planet of the Apes*. Studied by the government, the two soon become media heroes and are treated like royalty, taken on shopping trips and introduced to alcoholic beverages – scenes which inject a good dose of humor that reinforces the likability of the strong leads. But as soon as Zira discovers she's pregnant, a few feds are concerned about these talking apes and seek to have them destroyed in order to protect mankind from a future threat that may or may not happen. With their newborn baby in the good hands of circus owner Ricardo Montalban, Cornelius and Zira realize they cannot escape the cruelty of humans, and *don't*, in yet another unkind climax.

Their child Caesar (also played by McDowall) is all grown up in *Conquest of the Planet of the Apes*, in which a virus has destroyed all household pets, leading humans to train chimps and gorillas to be their servants. With the government still weary of a takeover by superintelligent apes, Caesar has to keep his mouth shut, but cannot for long. Seen as a hero, the other apes turn against their masters and band together to riot in a violent (and too lengthy) sequence that ends with them on top.

Thus, the series is cleverly brought back full circle to *Battle for the Planet of the Apes*, which finds Caesar as the king of a land that looks remarkably similar to that of the original. A bomb has wiped out civilization, forcing a band of radioactive humans underground who emerge only to wage war against the apes – an act that divides the apes against one another as well. Though easily the "worst" of the series, *Battle* is still a terrific film.

With original ideas, relevant themes and strong characterizations – not to mention fun rides into the unknown – the entire *Planet of the Apes* series holds up very, *very* well today.

Don't Look Down
(1998)
N/A
★★☆☆☆

Executive produced by Wes Craven, *Don't Look Down* is a promising *Vertigo* knock-off that quickly deteriorates into a lump of clichés. Pert Megan Ward stars as a TV reporter who begins to fear heights following the freak death of her younger sister from a fall off a cliff. Furthermore, Ward is haunted by visions and sounds of her dearly departed.

Trying to conquer her acrophobia, she joins a renegade therapy group whose patients soon start to die, in the typical one-by-one fashion. And yep, this unseen killer is setting it up so that it looks like she's the murderer. And of course the killer turns out to be not the guy everyone suspects, but the guy least like-

Videos reviewed in **HITCH** receive star ratings based not on artistic merit, but on levels of enjoyment, from ★☆☆☆☆ (as much fun as a funeral) to ★★★★★ (fun, fun, fun 'til daddy takes the TV away).

ly to have ice running through his blood.

Ward's always worth a watch, but the pacing and lack of originality just kill this effort cold. Craven had better start being pickier about what he attaches his name to, or it's back to those *People under the Stairs*. And as they say, you *Don't Look Down*.

Campfire Tales
(1996)
New Line Home Video
★★★☆☆

Positioned as being "in the tradition of *Scream*," the direct-to-video *Campfire Tales* isn't nearly as hip or clever – not to mention scary – as that phenomenon, but this anthology film is well above average. Four teens (including Christine Taylor of *The Brady Bunch Movie*) end up stranded on a deserted road following an Iron Maiden concert, and pass the time awaiting rescue by telling each other up-to-date variations on urban legends.

Aside from a brief '50-era prologue involving the ol' man-with-a-hook, the stories are about a newlywed couple hunted by the living dead, an Internet pedophile preying upon a girl home alone and a young man who finds the woman of his dreams in a haunted farmhouse. Of these three, the first may be the best, but the second has the best punchline. Ron Livingston (*Swingers*) and Jennifer McDonald stand out as the marrieds whose marriage doesn't last very long.

Most ridiculous is the ending to the wraparound story, which, from out of nowhere, turns serious and preachy. This is only slightly redeemed by a mid-credit coda that's good for a laugh. *Campfire Tales* may not be as flashy and fast as its current big-screen counterparts, but it sure beats *Urban Legend*.

Small Soldiers
(1998)
DreamWorks Home Entertainment
★★★☆☆

Joe Dante merges his own *Gremlins* with *Toy Story*, but comes up with a film that's not as good as either of those. Army men action figures come to life and attack all that is quiet on the suburban front, due to super-secret military computer chips that have been implanted in their plastic bodies by overeager toy manufacturers.

Cute kid neighbors Kirsten Dunst and Gregory Smith take it upon themselves to rid their homes of the pint-sized commandos, led by Maj. Chip Hazard (sporting the bark of Tommy Lee Jones). Following a few minor squabbles, the battle escalates into an all-out frontyard war involving modified home appliances.

The computer-animated toys are rendered wonderfully, and even though this is more violent and not-for-kids than you might think, it still plays it a bit too safe and bland. The late, great Phil Hartman and *Mr. Show*'s David Cross brighten the screen with their supporting bits, as does Dante's regular troupe of stock players – Dick Miller, Robert Picardo and Wendy Schaal. The requisite Dante in-jokes are here, too, with nods to classic war films like *Apocalypse Now*, *Patton* and *The Dirty Dozen*.

Friday the 13th
(1980)
Paramount Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

Though it's one of those films that "started it all," it's not a good one. For one thing, there's no hockey-masked killer in sight (the Jason we know and love didn't show up until *Part 2*); simply loose-moraled camp counselors smoking pot, playing strip Monopoly and then getting slaughtered by an unseen person bent on revenge. It's all pretty boring and slow-going.

Except for the end scene in which the kid comes out of the water (and nearly made me wet my pants when I first saw this), nothing in the movie is scarier than Kevin Bacon's haircut – even worse than the one he sported for *Footloose*. So far, *Friday* has given birth to eight sequels; the *Freddy vs. Jason* crossover is next.

Perverse Preachers, Fascist Fundamentalists and Kristian Kiddie Kooks
(1991)
Zontar Home Video
★★★☆☆

For those wondering how Christianity picked up such a bad rap, two hours worth of answers are here in this compendium of the worst of televangelism and religious broadcasting. Much of the madness on display by these nuts is too inexplicable for words. Suffice to say, it'll make you cry, "Oh, Lord," but not in the manner in which the onscreen subjects intended.

It begins with "Captain Hook," a minister with a hook for a hand. He scours the seas with his tubby buddy Fishhook, the Christian Pirate Puppets and a ventriloquist's dummy that raps. In this clip, he and Fishhook perform an autopsy on a sinner. "Oh, look at those hands," laments the Captain. "These hands have not been praying for the Lord." Coming full circle, the tape ends with the Captain making sinning kids walk the plank into the lake of fire.

A good portion of the tape features news reports documenting the fall of the PTL in the hands of Jim and Tammy Faye, the sex scandal of Jimmy Swaggart, the pay-or-I-die pleas of Oral Roberts and the failed presidential bid of Pat Robertson, who warns about the evils of money (which is akin to a fat guy telling you he doesn't eat food). Jessica Hahn's 1-900 commercial is tacked on for good measure, and a pre-scandal Robert Tilton also appears, and reminds me of *Saturday Night Live*'s Will Ferrell.

Small Soldiers, big trouble.

Various talking heads tell us that a $10,000 pledge will remove all diseases from your body, pray for TV towers to be erected across Africa and decry Megadeth and Iron Maiden (for their demonic imagery, not because their music is shit). For the kids, there is a horrifying animated singalong involving sheep and a show in which a clown named Lollipop handles a dead baby bird – a segment only slightly less disturbing than the preacher with no arms who has hands flailing about from his torso.

New Agers also get skewered in a segment that features a New Age comedian in a rainbow wig, a batty old woman dressed like a whore in queen's clothes awaiting the arrival of UFOs and a black guy who beams down to the set of *Teen Summit* and claims to come from the future. You won't believe the commercial for "Fantazia," a 4-oz. bottle of water that claims to heal you for a lifetime ... for only $79.95!

Prodigious editing could have made this collection much more fun, as several clips either go on far too long or could be excised entirely. I would hate to be the guy who put this tape together – some of the material is just so depressing to me – but we should all appreciate the sacrifice he has made to bring all of God's children this love gift.

Dumb Dances
(199?)
bootleg
★★★★☆

A homemade compendium of musical sequences from various psychotronic films, *Dumb Dances* makes much merry out of the worst and most out-of-place foot-steppin' scenes committed to celluloid. Not surprisingly, the stranger the film, the better the clip.

Ed Wood's *Glen or Glenda?* is represented by a bit of ooga-booga, while *King Kong vs. Godzilla* offers a more exotic tribal ritual. Some Hispanic honey shakes her moneymakers in a Santo movie, but Chesty Morgan lets

her cottage cheese tubs all hang out in a tummy-upsetting striptease from the infamous *Deadly Weapons*. For a more rock 'n' roll bent – albeit marionette style – there's the swingin' sounds of *Thunderbirds Are Go!*

The clips are introduced by some semi-amiable fat guy who growls each of his lines and wears a variety of silly masks, leading me to believe alcohol was involved in the day's taping. All the better.

1970s McDonald's Commercials
(197?)
bootleg
★★★★☆

That happy-ass Ronald McDonald skips his fruity way through a whole mess of television spots for every kid's favorite (and every parent's least favorite) restaurant, McDonald's. In these spots – shot on location in McDonaldland, home of thick shake volcanoes and apple pie trees – Ronald smiles his way through 60-second misadventures which humiliate all the other characters involved.

The "crafty" old Hamburglar – who has had quite a nose job since these ads – and his petty crimes are easily foiled with chocolate treats. The all-but-forgotten Capt. Crook fishes for Filet o' Fish sandwiches until Ronald pulls the plug on his boat. Grimace is portrayed as a blubbering idiot who steals cups ... and has four arms! Meanwhile, wastebaskets sing and dance, visiting kids are encouraged to play with lids and Ronald takes time to shill gift certificates. But where the hell is "Stop, Drop and Roll"?

Dreamscape
(1984)
Thorn-EMI Home Video
★★★☆☆

A baby-faced Dennis Quaid is at his cockiest in this low-budget thriller about a college research unit looking into eliminating nightmares via "dreamlinking." Quaid is a know-it-all tax evader with psychic abilities who is recruited by a barely there Max Von Sydow into participating in the experiments.

The dream sequences – always surreal, sometimes creepy – are the highlight, ranging from sexual encounters on a train and con*struction* site vertigo to nuclear war-ravaged zombies and a menacing "Snakeman." Quaid is called upon to assist the President (Eddie Albert) in shaking his own bad dreams, and that's where the enjoyable thriller takes a cockamamie conspiracy turn from which it never recovers.

Kate Capshaw – just before her close encounter with Spielberg – plays Quaid's busty love interest. The effects are passable, but pretty good for a B-movie. Joseph Ruben directed, prior to hitting it big a couple years later with the suburban horror tale *The Stepfather*. For the first half, *Dreamscape* will hold your interest; after that, it's a yawner.

Halloween 4:
The Return of Michael Myers
(1988)
Fox Video
★★★★☆
Halloween 5:
The Revenge of Michael Myers
(1989)
Fox Video
★★★☆☆

Of the wretched stretch of *Halloween* sequels that occurred between *II* and *H20*, *Halloween 4: The Return of Michael Myers* is the best. It doesn't come anywhere close to being great, but at least it had the sense to dispense with the Silver Shamrock crap and bring Michael Myers right back into the swing of things.

Ten years after the original slaughter, Myers escapes lock-up to terrorize his last remaining family member, Jamie (Danielle Harris), the daughter of the now-dead Laurie Strode character. Forever frightened of the bogeyman, she lives with a loving foster family that includes teenage girl Rachel (Ellie Cornell). And then goofy ol' bastard Donald Pleasance shows up as Dr. Loomis to limp and freak everyone out.

When reminding the town's police of his battle scars with Myers, Pleasance points to the *wrong side* of his face. As the requisite supporting hottie, Kathleen Kinmont wears a shirt that reads "COPS DO IT BY THE BOOK," until she removes it. Corny dialogue is not in short supply; witness this exchange in the institution prelude:

Paramedic: "Jesus!"

Guard (following well-planned pause): "Jesus ain't got nuthin' to do with this place."

At 90 minutes, *Halloween 4* moves quickly enough before it gets tiresome. Following Myers' tossing of three rednecks out of the back of a pickup (genius!), we get to the "final" confrontation – one that bears a heavy resemblance to that of *H20*, except that all heads stay intact.

The immediate (read: simultaneously filmed) follow-up, *Halloween 5: The Revenge of Michael Myers*, is a disappointment compared to the relative loose fun of *4*, but on its own, it's decent. Since she wasn't killed in the first one, Jamie is again Myers' stalking subject of choice, leading me to wonder if the guy's a serial killer or an ultra-aggressive pedophile. With Cornell offed soon after it begins – aw, come on, you didn't think she'd really last, did you? – *5* focuses far too much attention on her best friend, the annoying Madonna wannabe Tina (who had a different character name in *4*). She's even more painful to watch than the two bumbling officers of the law offered up as comic relief.

Myers has his way with several sexed-up teens at a Halloween barn party before finally coming home *again*, where Doc Loomis has a trap set up for him. The ending is ridiculous, with a never-seen man in steel-toed boots and an overcoat slaughters all the cops at the jail where Mikey is being held, thus paving the way for the even more ludicrous and nonsensical (but un-numbered) *Halloween: The Curse of Michael Myers*.

Bikini Summer 3: South Beach Heat
(1997)
New City Releasing
★☆☆☆☆

In keeping with our stringent policy of reviewing every movie with the word "Bikini" in the title, we had to force ourselves to watch *Bikini Summer 3*. No matter what you think, it truly was torturous.

Heather Elizabeth Parkhurst – she of the beer commercials' Swedish Bikini Team of yesteryear – takes the lead role as a makeup artist for swimsuit models who yearns to show off her own fake tits to a leering, drooling public. While all the other beach girls pose for photos and have wild, quick-edit sex, Heather has to stand on the sidelines and admire her own silicone form in the privacy of home. At least the other girls occasionally allow her to change clothes and shower with them, and such experiences always break out into a music-video montage of giggling gals and nipples that unnaturally point north.

Of course, Heather sees her dream of being seen as a sex toy comes true by the end, but not before she is stalked by some pervo snapping nudie pics of her. Do the plots ever get more complex?

2010
(1984)
MGM/UA Home Video
★★☆☆☆

When you have a movie as perfect as Stanley Kubrick's classic *2001: A Space Odyssey*, the last thing you want to do is a sequel. But *Outland* hack Peter Hyams apparently thought otherwise (and wrong). Roy Scheider stars as an American astronaut who joins a Russian mission to space to retrieve the Discovery (the ship from the original film) from crashing into Jupiter. The monolith shows up. Keir Dullea's ghost warns that "something wonderful" is about to happen, but in Hyams' hands, it's most underwhelming.

2010 is a movie that was an expensive one

to make, yet still looks cheap. The scenes on Earth are silly, and only a few of the space scenes impress. Whereas Kubrick's pacing was methodical, Hyams' is headache-inducing. I did like the final shot, even if it's nothing of a surprise.

Very Bad Things
(1998)
PolyGram Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

Remove the "s" from the title, and that's what this first film from actor-turned-director Peter Berg is. Similar to *Stag* – including the fact that it sucked – *Things* centers on a bachelor party that goes most awry when the stripper suffers an accidental death, setting off a chain reaction of homicidal events. In the hands of a skilled writer of black comedy, the situation could be very funny. Unfortunately, it comes off here as unnecessarily cruel and mean.

Death *can* be funny (witness *Heathers*), but Berg wants to shock you while making you laugh. There's a fine balance between the two, and he stumbles so poorly that he can't do either right. Cameron Diaz shows off fine comic timing, but Christian Slater, Jon Favreau, Daniel Stern and Jeremy Piven would be best to leave this one off the resume.

Plump Fiction
(1996)
Rhino Video
★★★☆☆

A spoof of Quentin Tarantino's Oscar-winning *Pulp Fiction* and a multitude of other independent films, *Plump Fiction* has many easy targets. Too bad it doesn't try hard as it should to hit them with any true comic force.

Paul Dinello and Tommy Davidson take on the Travolta and Jackson roles as exterminators who discuss the French translations of various Disney characters and the fine points of waxing women's mustaches. Narrowly escaping being killed by a homicidal couple (a parody of *Natural Born Killers*), Davidson decides to quit the biz, while Dinello performs a favor for his boss by accompanying his fat wife (a padded Julie Brown) to an afternoon food feast. During this long sequence, the two end up bound and gagged in the basement of a convenience store and run into a band of robbing nuns (playing off *Reservoir Dogs*). If it sounds a little forced and scattershot, it is. Add to that various ribbings on *Forrest Gump*, *Nell*, *Clerks*, *Priscilla: Queen of the Desert*, *Apollo 13*, *Waterworld*, *The Crying Game*, *El Mariachi*, *Do the Right Thing*, *Reality Bites* and *The Piano*, and you've got an overstuffed movie that – even at an abbreviated 80 or so minutes – somehow manages to feel a little slow.

Still, *Plump* is not without some clever bits. In the diner sequence, some guy does a dead-on impersonation of Christopher Walken, who goes on and on about storing miscellaneous items in his rectum. That, however, is topped by Pamela Segall, who apes Juliette Lewis in *NBK* to a T. Her performance – a damn funny one – garners all the out-loud laughs to be had. After an uninspired stretch with those nuns, *Plump* picks up some steam toward the end, and continues it through several groups of end-credit outtakes.

I Still Know What You Did Last Summer
(1998)
Columbia/Tri-Star Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

Mr. Fishstick is back, slicing and dicing his way through one of the most routine horror films of this decade. While the original *I Know What You Did Last Summer* was no pinnacle, it still had some smarts and scares, thanks mostly to the deft hand of writer Kevin Williamson, who is Tolstoy compared to Trey Calloway, whose Hollywood scribe career certainly will end here.

Jennifer Love Hewitt Inc. reprises her role as shrieking Julie James. As the flick picks up one year later, she's still haunted by dreams of getting hooked by the menacing man in the rainslick. To ease her pain, college roomie Brandy makes her tag along on an all-expenses-paid trip to the Bahamas that she has just won on the radio. (It should be noted that director Danny Cannon succeeds only in making the Bahamas look entirely unappealing.) With buff boyfriends in tow, the two girls soon learn their island is no paradise. Someone's ruined their karaoke session! Someone's stuck the maid in the dryer! Someone's locked Love in the tanning bed! Someone's forgotten what it takes to make a good movie!

Knowing his movie sucks, Cannon shows as much of Hewitt's breasts as often as he can, and for this, I'm not complaining. But the only thing scary in this *Summer* is Brandy's enormous ass. The ending – all two or three of them – is ludicrous and insulting. Any franchise that chooses to kill off Sarah Michelle Gellar but allow Brandy to survive is headed entirely in the wrong direction, if you ask me.

Vanishing Point
(1971)
Fox Video
★★★☆☆

With soul music blaring from the radio and a tummy full of amphetamines, a Vietnam vet named Kowalski (Barry Newman) takes to the road for a marathon dash from Colorado to California, trying to beat the clock to win a bet. Naturally, this sort of reckless endeavor raises the ire of all sorts of law officials from various states, which Kowalski treats like bumper cars on the highway. Utilizing very little dialogue – or plot – *Vanishing Point* is as true of a "road movie" as one can get; it's chase after chase, with only the occasional senseless flashback breaking the rush.

In a nutty metaphysical subplot, Cleavon Little is a blind DJ who "connects" with Kowalski via the airwaves and acts as a narrator for the driver's run. This mumbo-jumbo is pretty heavy-handed, but thankfully not an issue until the film is almost complete. Newman has just about the easiest acting job ever filmed; he doesn't have to memorize many lines ... just drive really fast. Though dated severely and making little sense, it is one of the '70s' genuine cult items.

The Erotic House of Wax
(1996)
New City Releasing
★☆☆☆☆

Great title! Great idea! Great God, those can't be real! Actually, *The Erotic House of Wax* is as limp as a candlewick. Two skanky college girls and their boyfriends spend a weekend in a wax museum, newly inherited by one of the girls from her dead grandfather. Seems Gramps was a bit of a pervo, as his sculptures are recreations of famous lovers (Casanova, Romeo, Cleopatra, et al) engaged in various R-rated poses.

But the kick is that when one of the gals hangs her New Age crystals on the figures' necks, they spring to life and get busy! But busy doesn't necessarily mean productive, and in this case, it means boring. The kids get a bright idea to open this house to the public for showings, so someone gets a kick out of it. It just won't be you.

Can't Hardly Wait
(1998)
Columbia/Tri-Star Home Video
★★★★☆

Recently a major critic panned *Can't Hardly Wait*, bemoaning that today's directors have passed on being influenced by Coppola and Scorsese in favor of John Hughes. So what's wrong with that? I don't *want* to see a

Saturday Morning's Alright for Reading

As I'm sure it was for all of you, Saturday morning used to be *the* highlight of the week. My brothers and I would get up awfully damned early and watch the end credits of *Farm Report* on Ch. 4, waiting for the cartoons to kick in. When they did, we were settled in – PJs and all – for the next five hours of animated bliss.

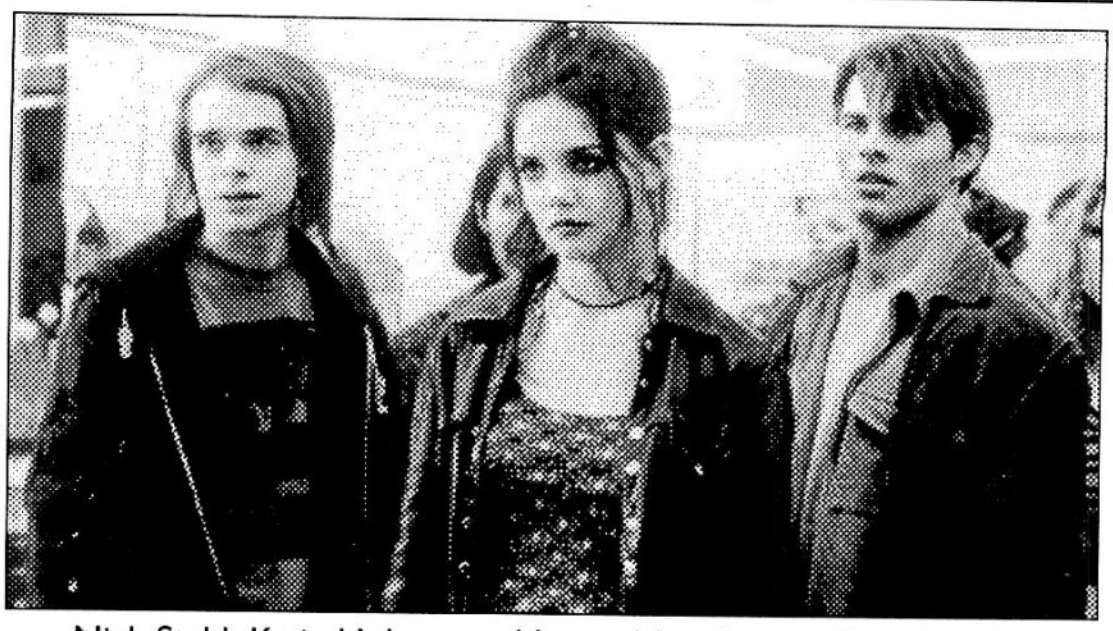
Celebrating such glorious times is the new book *Saturday Morning Fever* (St. Martin's Griffin, $17.95), by brothers Timothy and Kevin Burke (the latter a former editor of the short-lived *Film Threat* offshoot *Wild Cartoon Kingdom*).

The jacket says it does for cartoons what "the *Psychotronic Guide* did for exploitation films." Uh, not exactly, kids. That would require an exhaustive review of every cartoon of the era, not to mention plenty of great art. And this isn't it. But what it *does* do is provide a spark for your own childhood nostalgia.

The Burke boys begin with a quasi-historical discussion of Saturday morning as it relates to the government and other powers that be, leading to a battle I believe was not as impactful as they would have you believe. Gratefully, this lesson is redeemed with the next chunk of the book, comprised of brief discussions of the most noteworthy programs of the time, from the truly great (*Superfriends* and *Scooby-Doo*) to the truly obscure (remember the short-lived *Pac-Man*? *Mighty Man and Yukk*?).

Regrettably, they choose to pepper the book with unwise (and unfunny) attempts at humorous sidebars, like "Cartoon Animals We'd Like to See" and "The Missing G.I. Joes." After trying to establish themselves as experts, crap like this does much to kill their credibility.

Saturday Morning Fever is a largely fun read, but not the definitive work on the subject that it wants to be. Until that book comes, however, this will have to suffice.



Nick Stahl, Katie Holmes and James Marsden smirk and star in a very special – yet very twisted – episode of *Dawson's Creek*.

teen party movie from those guys.

Thus, there's nothing inherently wrong with *Can't Hardly Wait*, which merges the complicated love story of *Say Anything...* with the outrageous party sequence from *Sixteen Candles*. It pays tribute to them both without coming off like a direct copy. Set on graduation day, it is funny on its own merits and full of young talent. As the lovesick lead with the unrequited hots for Jennifer Love Hewitt, Ethan Embry has a charming goofiness that keeps this thing afloat. Charlie Korsmo (all grown up from *Dick Tracy*) is the nerd out for revenge on the football stud who has made his life a living hell, and Seth Green (*Austin Powers*) is hilarious as an insecure white kid who thinks he's black.

It's not going to solve a single world problem. It's not going to make you think. But it is a genuinely amusing, semi-sweet movie that is smarter than most films aimed at the high-school audience. Because John Hughes would've wanted it that way.

Disturbing Behavior
(1998)
MGM/UA Home Video
★★★☆☆

A slight variation on *The Stepford Wives*, the aggressively loud *Disturbing Behavior* plops the sensitive hunk James Marsden in the quiet town of Cradle Bay, where he soon learns he doesn't quite fit in with his high school classmates. The school is evenly divided into two student factions: the "Blue Ribbons" and everyone else.

The Blue Ribbons are an elite team of letter jacket-wearing jocks and the girls who love them – each one dedicated to clean living, hair pomade and hanging out at the malt shop. On occasion, when a Ribbon sees something awry – a slut, for example – something in their brain goes crazy and turns them into killing machines.

Marsden teams up with smoky chick Katie Holmes (her perennial *Dawson's Creek* pout intact, but she does get her perky boob grabbed), an inexplicable albino character and retarded janitor Bill Sadler to get to the bottom of the mystery surrounding this clique-cum-cult, the answer for which lies in a local mental hospital and its doc, played by Bruce Greenwood.

While there's nothing terrible about *Disturbing Behavior*, there's nothing incredibly involving about it, either. It has the hip, self-aware dialogue thing down pat (I must be getting old, because I didn't understand half their lingo), but little in the way of shocks or scares. Call it *The X-Files 90210*.

Destroyer
(1988)
Virgin Vision
★★☆☆☆

When a serial killer the size of Lyle Alzado – okay, he *is* Lyle Alzado – is electrocuted in prison, yet he doesn't quite die, what's the stupidest thing you could do? Letting a bunch of civilians in to film a movie, that's what – and that's exactly what happens in this piece of STV dreck.

Anthony Perkins is the director of a film called *Death House Dolls*. Filming is not going all that well, mostly because members of his crew keep running into Alzado. The prison warden gets welded into a toilet stall and set afire as he's taking a dump, one cop gets jackhammered onto a wall, a crew member's head is placed on the Xerox machine and Perkins himself eventually gets the chair. Former *Valley Girl* Deborah Foreman is the one who lives to have the requisite third-act final showdown.

Notable mostly to see the now-dead Alzado try to act menacing, *Destroyer* is silly,

non-scary camp. This is probably the only film in which a grip character is named Rewind, and furthermore, the only film in which a character named Rewind says, "The tungsten element must be bogus!" Need I even mention the inclusion of the original song "Kiss My Stinky White Ass"?

Psycho
(1960)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★★
Psycho
(1998)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★☆☆
Psycho II
(1993)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★☆☆☆
Psycho IV: The Beginning
(1990)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★☆

Alfred Hitchcock's matricide masterpiece is every bit as shocking and spooky today, even if you already know what happens ... and you do. In a performance that was so good it typecast him forever, Anthony Perkins is the lanky Norman Bates, a seedy motel owner with a dozen empty rooms and one whacked-out mother. Janet Leigh is the would-be embezzler on the road to salvation, were it not for her unfortunate stop at the Bates place, not to mention her decision to step into the shower.

That fabled shower sequence is a masterstroke of both direction and editing, forcing you to think you saw more than you did, in both flesh and blood. But other sequences stand out, too, including the stair-top murder of Martin Balsam, Vera Miles' discovery of Mother Bates and the chilling, final shot of Norman with his mom's skull superimposed over his leering face in a near-subliminal fashion. Saul Bass' inventive titles and Bernard Hermann's mad-strings score help add to the uneasiness.

Psycho has every right to be called a classic, especially since it runs rings around every subsequent killer thriller released. No surprise, since it has influenced damn near all of them. Perhaps Hitch's most popular film, it is also perhaps his best.

I still do not understand why anyone would dare remake it, either, but Gus Van Sant did, and while I don't approve of the practice, his pop-art *Psycho* is not the lump of coal you would expect. Much of its fun comes from seeing how anal Van Sant is about matching Hitch's picture shot by shot, line by line. But much of its shortcomings come from Van Sant's failure to match the master in any of the key sequences in which he should have excelled; instead, he succeeds in making them the worst parts of the film.

Vince Vaughn does a credible job as Norman, but Julianne Moore's lesbian take of the Miles role is hard to swallow (with "Let me get my Walkman" being the most ludicrous line of the year). The strongest acting comes from those inhabiting the throwaway supporting roles – particularly William H. Macy, Rita Wilson, James LeGros and Robert Forster; they seem to be in on the joke. As for Anne Heche, well, let's just say I was happy to see she wouldn't be around for the second half.

Holding true to his promise, Van Sant didn't change a hell of a lot from the original, except for having Norman masturbate (does *everything* have to be spelled out for the '90s audience?) and throwing in some pretentious, near-subliminal shots that have nothing to do with anything.

But it's better than *Psycho II*, the needless sequel that has Perkins revisiting his most famous character, now declared sane and fit to roam free. As soon as he returns to his old stomping grounds, however, "Mother" begins to call him and leave threatening notes, forcing Norman back to his old ways. Sporting Fisher-Price hair, Meg Tilly befriends Norman, for reasons explained in a ridiculous twist that dares screw with the *Psycho* mythology.

The made-for-cable *Psycho IV: The Beginning* fared much better, providing a credible backstory that showed how young Norman (*E.T.*'s Henry Thomas) spiraled into insanity. Told by Perkins via flashbacks, the film focuses on Norman's twisted, incestuous relationship with his batty mom (Olivia Hussey), who's kind one moment and cruel the next. With surprisingly high production values, *Psycho IV* may not be scary, but it's the most interesting chapter of the stories that followed in this unlikely franchise.

Dark City
(1998)
New Line Home Video
★★★☆☆

Dark City certainly is not the year's best film, as Roger Ebert so boasted, but it may have been 1998's tops in terms of visual style. A heaping mystery of *creep noir*, it makes very little sense. HITCH readers may recall our review of this film's preview (see HITCH 18); after finally viewing the entire movie, I can't say that it seems any more lucid.

But this much I do know: Director Alex Proyas (*The Crow*) does possess an unmistakable gift for imagery, and could do wonders (if he was allowed) with the rumored *Batman Triumphant*. Just don't let him write the script.

Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island
(1998)
Warner Home Video
★★★☆☆

Faithful to the spirit of the early days of *Scooby-Doo, Where Are You?*, the straight-to-

tape feature *Scooby-Doo on Zombie Island* pits our beloved gang of ghost-bustin' teenagers against the undead of the bayou. Werewolves, vicious meow-cats and the titular zombies all rear their ugly, penciled heads in this comic mystery.

Pretty well-animated for an STV affair, *Island* takes a grim turn toward the end, with man-into-monster transformation scenes that likely would frighten the kiddie audience at which this is aimed. When it's all over, you'll be wanting to watch old episodes of the show rather than take a repeat viewing, but at least that bastard pup Scrappy-Doo is nowhere to be found. Third Eye Blind sings the theme song.

Juvenile Delinquent Scare Films: Volume 1
(1996)
Something Weird Video

★★☆☆☆

As those teenage punks take control of our streets, the authorities take matters into their owns via a series of filmed programs entitled *Searchlights on Delinquency*. These 1950s shorts are hosted by pudgy, bespectacled Sheriff Joseph Lohman who wonders about the tragedies that may occur when some ruffian "breaks a pop bottle and goes to injure" another during a heated dice game. Utilizing stats, charts and an unwavering monotone drone, Lohman illustrates his point that all kids are bad apples, rotten to the core.

We even see obviously staged footage of juvies in action, using their "learned, acquired skills" of "jackrolling" innocents and throwing laundry at windows. To further probe the criminal mind, one reformed – but not at all ashamed – gang member is interviewed about his exploits. To hide his anonymity, he wears some cheap and eerie disguise that resembles what you might get if you wore a bedtime beauty mask with a Kleenex attached to it. This headgear is so unnervingly creepy that you don't pay attention to a lick of what the kid says.

Another scenario shows the mortal danger of a gang initiation, as the new kid in the neighborhood is forced to walk across a 12-foot wall while the others pelt him with stones. Stupid, yes, but much less harmful than, say, raping sorority girls or shooting at drivers who dare flash their headlights.

After an hour of Lohman, we are told the story of Nora, a mixed-up lulu of an 15-year-old with slanted lips. She tells her 23-year-old suitor that she's really 18 so that he'll take her to a swingin' party. Her ruse might have worked had she not started talking enthusiastically about the upcoming Sadie Hawkins Dance at school. Returning home at 3 a.m., she is greeted with stern looks from her parents, who ground her for a month. Nora lashes out with tantrums, smoking in her room and performing seizure dances in front of Mom, before landing in juvy hall. When Mom comes to visit, the counselor tells her what a mean, uptight bitch she is ... in so many words, at least.

This Nora story really picks things up, but more variety in films would have greatly aided this collection.

The Big One
(1998)
Miramax Home Video

★★★☆☆

Roger & Me filmmaker/watchdog Michael Moore takes on corporate America as he travels the States on a 47-city book tour. The cameras follow him wherever he goes, from public appearances and book signings to picket lines and corporation lobbies.

His visits to the various companies that continue to make record profits yet put people out of work stand as the highlights of this renegade documentary. In particular, the PR hacks who "greet" him at Johnson Controls and Procter & Gamble look like they're about to cry as he gives them "Downsizer of the Year" awards to pass on to their CEO. When Moore talks to townspeople that suddenly find themselves unemployed, *The Big One* can become mighty depressing.

It's not as funny as *Roger & Me*, which I attribute to its lack of focus. Moore's intent for this film was a seat-of-the-pants approach, so it was to be expected. Appearing briefly on camera are would-be bomber Richard Jewell, ugly author Garrison Keillor, unblinking politician Steve Forbes, Cheap Trick guitarist Rick Nielsen and the dark overlord Satan ... er, I mean Nike CEO Phil Knight.

Jack Frost
(1997)
A-Pix Home Entertainment

★★☆☆☆

Not to be confused with Michael Keaton's kid-friendly dead-snowman movie – but oh, what if it was! – *Jack Frost* is a comedic horror picture in which the killer is a slow-moving, sadistic cousin of Frosty. On the eve of a serial killer's execution, his transfer van collides with a truck carrying some chemicals. They crash, and he is showered with the contents of the other vehicle, thereby altering his DNA, which turns him into a snowman. You laugh, but this shit *could* happen!

So Jack Frost, now in a cold, powdery form, starts hunting for the cop that put him behind bars in the first place. He cuts one kid's head off with the blades of a sled, pins another boy to a wall with icicles shot from his hands and beats a bathing beauty to a pulp in the bathtub. It would very much like to be another *Evil Dead*, but the humor is of the post-death-quip variety ("I told you I just wanted to *ax* you somethin'!") and the horrors all found in the trappings of the low budget.

Double Dragon
(1994)
MCA/Universal Home Video

★☆☆☆☆

The first *Mortal Kombat* aside, making movies out of video games is a terrible idea. And though you would've thought *Super Mario Bros.* would have taught the world this valuable lesson, the makers of *Double Dragon* must have ditched school that day. Pretty boys Mark Dacascos and Scott Wolf (pre-*Party of Five*) portray brothers who are championship martial artists and drive around their post-apocalyptic California town in their "Dragon Wagon," befitted with an exhaust system that shoots flames. Radical!

These brothers are in possession of half of an ancient talisman that makes it owner supreme being or something. Evil, slimy villain Robert Patrick (several levels below *Terminator 2*) has the other half and wants the complete set so that he may rule. To conquer Patrick, Dacascos jumps into Patrick's body and makes him hit himself. Whatever. Someone kicks Alyssa Milano and asks, "*Now* who's the boss?" Enough.

This is one of those movies where the two leads turn to each other and scream at the same time. This is also one of those movies where the two leads high-five each other. For those reasons alone, this is one of those movies that I would pay to have removed from video shelves.

Get a Life: Volume One
(1990)
Rhino Home Video

★★★★★

Chris Elliott's FOX sitcom *Get a Life* was short-lived, which is no surprise, really. The ultimate anti-sitcom, it somehow came across as smart, intelligent entertainment while having its star be stupid. The hideous laugh track kicked in at every line, while in-the-know viewers laughed at the more subtle humor that

wasn't accompanied by canned guffaws. In short, *Get a Life* was nearly a decade ahead of its time, and today would probably be a ratings hit. It certainly plays better now – as Rhino's two-tape release proves – but then again, I was always hooked from its first airing, with Elliott's 30-year-old loser paperboy riding his bike in the credit sequence (backed by R.E.M.'s "Stand"), flinging the daily edition in ways that the realms of physical comedy could not fathom.

On *Volume One* are two episodes, "The Prettiest Week of My Life" and "Bored Straight." In the former, Chris ignores his parents' warnings and plunks down some hard-earned money to enroll in the fly-by-night Handsome Boy Modeling School to pursue his dreams of doing a runway show at the local department store. Run by a sublime Brian Doyle Murray, the School is a perfect setting for Elliott's brand of retarded-fish-out-of-water humor. Trying to show up a fellow student with straight-A looks who goes by the *nom de plume* of Sapphire, Chris tells the instructor that his modeling name is Sparkles. His world comes crashing down around him, however, when his first job requires that he pose topless.

A tad less funny but equally entertaining is "Bored Straight," in which Chris takes a wrong turn on his paper route and is accosted a gang of hoodlums who punch him in the stomach. ("It just keeps swelling!" Chris complains to his mom, who replies, "That's fat, Chris.") Not wishing to see youth go further awry, he invites them all to his house for snacks and group therapy, followed by a field trip to the supermarket. When his rehabilitation methods prove fruitless, he decides to beat them at their own game by undergoing their initiation ritual, which involves – among other tasks – bobbing for apples in toxic waste.

Like FOX's *other* late, great, misunderstood comedy series *The Ben Stiller Show*, *Get a Life* was better and funnier than any network sitcom on the air during its time – and holds true for today as well.

Atomic TV: Volume 4
(1997)
Atomic Books
★★★★★

Atomic TV: Volume 5
(1997)
Atomic Books
★★★★☆

Atomic TV: Volume 10
(1998)
Atomic Books
★★★☆☆

From the deep, dark heart of Baltimore comes *Atomic TV*, a self-described "a media maxipad absorbing the continual flow of pop culture." If you live in Baltimore, you can catch it on public access; for everyone else, Atomic Books has released several episodes on tape.

One of *Atomic TV*'s very best, *Volume 4* begins with *The "Appropriated Image Is Everything" Episode*, a gala celebration of copyright infringement. Most fascinating is the section dealing with multimedia artists Emergency Broadcast Network, whose cable-feed collages make for some incredible electronic overloads (particularly one that fuses a Mariah Carey video with Harrison Ford screaming "Get down!" from *Patriot Games*). The similar-missioned Barbie Liberation Organization also is featured, as are videos from Pizzicato Five and "Weird Al" Yankovic; commercials advertising the most twisted children's game ever, Pie Face; and the incredibly clever *Apocalypse Pooh*. Following is *The "Cavalcade of Freaks" Episode*, with clips a-plenty from Tod Browning's *Freaks*, old *Ripley's Believe It Or Not* shorts, trailers of *The Mutations* and *The Thing with Two Heads* and various other oddities, including a legless farmer, a one-armed baseball player and a one-legged tap dancer. Aside from old footage of a man with a conjoined twin fetus coming out of his stomach, the highlight is Baltimore's own "Penile Knievel," who, on a drunken dare, shoots bottle rockets out of his urethra, not once but *thrice*. Splinters, anyone?

Volume 5 contains both *The "It's Wonderful Being a Girl" Episode* and *The "Atomic TV Leftovers" Episode*. The first concerns itself with all things menstrual. Intercut with (sometimes jumpy) interviews of local Marylanders discussing their encounters with the monthly bill are vintage educational films about menses, including the classic bit from *Pink Slip* featuring an actual girl with Down's Syndrome learning all about bloody pads. The *Leftovers* half is a mixed mishmash of odds 'n' ends, including a funny interview with Shonen Knife and a hysterical music video from Mr. T's ill-advised '80s self-esteem foray, *Be Somebody*. Finally, the lovely Stella Gambino salutes the condom, and introduces footage of penile warts being removed via laser. This clinical procedure was unearthed by yours truly, specifically for HITCH *Found Footage: Volume 1*, and I am honored for Ms. Gambino to present it here.

The soon-to-be-legendary *Volume 10* – brought to you by the letter X – is *The "East Coast Video Show" Porn Convention Episode*, in which our affable duo and their video camera take to the floor of *the* adult video industry event of the year and interview several porn starlets (including Shayla LaVeaux and Stephanie Swift), who all come across as pathetic individuals with zero self-esteem and totally willing to let strangers touch them all over. Some of the highlights, er, come with some truly sick hardcore inserts edited into the two-hour romp, including Jerry Butler basting a turkey carcass and Liza Harper showing off her abnormally large sphincter. We also get to see clips from *Monaco Forever*, co-starring Jean-Claude Van Damme as "The Homosexual"; an X-rated, stop-motion animated short entitled *No Strings Attached*; deleted scenes from *Boogie Nights*; Nina Hartley sporting a vagina hand-puppet; and a hysterical kung-fu brawl between Butler and the tubby Ron Jeremy. Some of what they shot is hilarious, some of it is disgusting. Your enjoyment of the episode no doubt hinges on your level of prudeness. I really have to hand it to them for scoring their opening montage of trade-show debauchery with James Taylor Quartet's rendition of "Music to Watch Girls By." It's that kind of clever irony that makes *Atomic TV* addictive viewing.

I don't know how they get away with half the stuff they do, but they should be ashamed of themselves. Good work, gentlemen.

Jackie Brown
(1997)
Miramax Home Video
★★★★☆

As a follow-up to *Pulp Fiction*, Quentin Tarantino adapted an Elmore Leonard crime novel, and packed it full of deceit, deception and a couple of faded stars from the '70s. Former blaxploitation queen Pam Grier (*Coffy*) is the titular small-time stewardess embroiled in a money-and-blow transfer scheme for her "other" employer, the scary, ponytailed gunrunner played by Samuel L. Jackson.

When Jackie is caught by the feds, she hatches a complex plan to turn the tables not only on Jackson, but the feds themselves, in order to waltz away with half a million dollars. To succeed, she recruits the help of Max Cherry, her lonely, smitten bail bondsman, played to perfection by Robert Forster.

At 2.5 hours, *Jackie Brown* is intended to be a intricately plotted crime epic; for the most part, it succeeds. Its shortcomings come from the fact that it is perhaps *too* intricate. Even after two screenings, I still can't quite figure out all the machinations at work. Tarantino does another fine job in the direc-

tor's chair, showing extreme skill during a shopping mall scam that we see from three different characters' viewpoints. He also elicits great work from all the leads, as well as supporting players Michael Keaton, Bridget Fonda and Robert DeNiro.

But it is the work of Forster – unbelievably excellent – who makes this a must-see. In one of the 10 best performances I have ever seen, Forster plays the kindly old pro bit, conveying most of his emotions through his squinting, wrinkled eyes than anything else. His purchase of a Delfonics cassette to feel a connection to Jackie – a woman he knows he can love but cannot have – is heartbreaking and uplifting. Forster was rewarded with an Oscar nomination, when he really deserved to take the gold all the way home.

The Faculty
(1998)
Dimension Home Video
★★★★☆

If *Body Snatchers* invaded *The Breakfast Club*, you'd have *The Faculty*, a humor-filled horror collaboration between director Robert Rodriguez (*From Dusk till Dawn*) and Kevin Williamson (*Scream*). At a tough Texas high school, an alien force has taken over the

"Sssh," whispers Josh Hartnott in *The Faculty*. "Don't tell Harry Knowles we've got Twinkies."

teachers, putting them into a zombie-like state. As soon as the entire faculty has been "converted," they go for the students. A small contingent of students, however, are on to the plan and its vastly different types – the brain, the jock, the loner, the princess, etc. – band together to fight back.

Admittedly, the premise is weak, in that it's something done a million times before. But with Rodriguez' fluid camera and Williamson's knowing take on the concept, they turn it into a fun piece of pulp. Elijah Wood does the best job of all the students, which also includes striking newcomer Laura Harris and please-let-your-career-be-over-now Josh Hartnott (*Halloween: H20*). Members of the faculty include Robert Patrick, Salma Hayek, Piper Laurie, Jon Stewart and Famke Jannsen, all of whom have very little screen time. Making a cameo as the film teacher (*Film class? In a high school?*) is Internet geek Harry Knowles, who is extremely tubby and reveals himself to be just as good at acting as he is at spelling, punctuation and grammar (in other words, *not*).

Dr. Dolittle
(1998)
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment
★★☆☆☆

A remake of the Rex Harrison musical flop from the '60s, there is little fun in this *Dolittle*, although there's a lot going on. Making another kid-friendly vehicle based upon a decades-old film, Eddie Murphy stars as a successful but stressed-out surgeon who thinks he's going mad when he begins to hear voices of all animals with whom he comes in contact.

Norm McDonald voices the stray dog that Murphy picks up (not "picks up" in the sense that Murphy does transvestite hookers, mind you), while Chris Rock provides the sass to his daughter's pet guinea pig. Other celebrity voices include Albert Brooks as a suicidal tiger, Garry Shandling as an insecure pigeon, Jenna Elfman as an ailing owl and John Leguizamo as a rat. The animals yip and yap constantly, keeping the film moving at a wild pace. The only problem is the writers forgot to include anything beyond jokes involving gaseous explosions from one orifice or another.

National Lampoon's Senior Trip
(1995)
New Line Home Video
★★☆☆☆

A group of high-school losers get to go to Washington to meet the President, in the last *Lampoon* vehicle to see a theatrical release. Former *Max Headroom* Matt Frewer is the picked-upon principal who chaperones the gang, while Tommy Chong has a small role as the bus driver who snacks on horse tranquilizers. Drug humor is a big part of this *Trip*, and it comes off as really desperate. None of the kids in this group were known prior to this, and that status hasn't changed an iota since.

Unimaginative and rather juvenile, *Senior Trip* only manages to wring a few good laughs out of you, and they all have to do with Kevin McDonald (*Kids in the Hall*) as a psychotic crossing guard who thinks he's aboard the Starship Enterprise. He's far too funny for this. If you watch *Senior Trip* on cable, you'll get to see the original (and better) ending, in which the leads accidentally assassinate our nation's leader.

Christian Youth Scare Films: Volume 3
(1996)
Something Weird Video
★★★★☆

Satan be damned! The Almighty kicks ass left and right in the final chapter of the *Christian Youth* series, starting with *Teenage Testament*, in which young Roy works for his Aunt Gertie at her malt shop, where he's quick to dish out some gospel with a scoop of ice cream. He preaches to many customers, but particularly needles Josh, the cab driver with "a real dilly" of an ulcer. "Sounds like you need food for the soul," Roy says. With his brimstone counter behavior (and creepy automaton looks) driving customers away, Gertie asks Roy to can the "the religious talk," so he's torn between honoring his family's wishes and doing what he knows is right. As a fellow Christian tells him, he's "really in a spot." But before long, he's got Aunt Gertie piping hymns into the shop, customers or no customers. Hallelujah!

In *Teenage Challenge*, Dave enters the school essay contest about the biggest challenge teens face. Why, to be a Christian, he answers in 500 words or less. His entry is one of the winners, but the heathen school board won't let him read it at the assembly because of its controversial content. Rather than write another, he rejoices when the editor of the school paper promises to run it in the next edition. Yea! Separation of church and state sucks!

Teenage Crusade has a youth group planning a "jalopy raid" to bring wayward souls to their next church party, complete with cool, not-at-all-stupid activities like egg races and playing ping-pong using only your breath. "A jalopy raid," says one hesitant hoodlum, "how corny can you get?" Agreed, greaser.

With more bad halo jokes than there were locusts at the plague, this edition also features *The Red Trap*, a short about the dangers of Communist hussies. A bit of trivia: The first two films on this tape both contain the angry line, "Alright, you clowns!"

Nightwatch
(1997)
Dimension Home Video
★★★★☆

A little thriller that went virtually unnoticed, *Nightwatch* is one of the few modern suspense stories that is actually suspenseful. With a wavering accent, *Trainspotting*'s Ewan MacGregor portrays a law student who signs on the graveyard shift as a security guard for the medical examiner's office. He expects to sit on his ass and study; he ends up in a com-

plicated conspiracy of dead hookers with their eyes cut out ... and him being framed for the string of whore murders.

Nick Nolte is the detective investigating the case, who believes in MacGregor's innocence until the clues begin pointing his way. Ditto for Patricia Arquette, as his long-suffering girlfriend. (Josh Brolin and button-cute Lauren Graham also co-star.) For the most part, Ole Bornedal's direction is stylish, claustrophobic and thoroughly effective (which it should be, as he's remaking his own film here), and the screenplay co-authored with indie god Steven Soderbergh is tight and taut. For a pleasant change, I didn't know who the killer was, but when that person's identity is finally revealed two-thirds into it, much of the fun is removed with the mystery.

"This is like one of those USA movies," MacGregor confides to Nolte at one point. It may show up there someday, but it's heads above that dreck.

The Funhouse
(1981)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Four stoner teens have a double date at a local carnival and decide to spend the night in the funhouse. Bad idea, as it's run by a homicidal mongoloid wearing a Frankenstein mask. One guess as to how many of the four live to see daylight.

Directed by Tobe Hooper just before his crowning glory of *Poltergeist*, *The Funhouse* begins with the most blatant rip-off of *Halloween* and *Psycho* yet, but it's done so as a joke. A brief trip to the freak farm early in the film lets us see a cow with a cleft palate and another heifer sporting two heads. If only the rest were this visually compelling. *Funhouse* moves too slow for you to want to grab a brass ring.

The Negotiator
(1998)
Warner Home Video
★★★★☆

Much of what makes the hostage drama *The Negotiator* great is seeing two of our greatest actors – Samuel L. Jackson and Kevin Spacey – duking it out verbally for two-and-a-half hours. Jackson stars as an ace hostage negotiator for the Chicago PD who finds his partner killed and himself framed for the crime in a case of pension-fund fraud.

To clear his name, Jackson assumes the role of criminal and takes hostages himself in the internal affairs office. As a rival negotiator, Spacey is called in to help end the siege, but gradually becomes more interested in aiding Jackson in his seemingly hopeless cause.

F. Gary Gray (*Set It Off*) keeps the clock ticking at all times, and while the action scenes are well-done, it is the psychological game of ping-pong between the leads that keeps the film suspenseful. It also is not routine, in that it is not so easy to figure out whodunwhat until the end.

Death of a Centerfold: The Dorothy Stratten Story
(1981)
MGM/UA Home Video
★★☆☆☆

In a career low, Jamie Lee Curtis portrayed doomed Playmate Dorothy Stratten in a seedy, slow-going, true-story TV-movie produced by that noted filmmaker Larry Wilcox, star of *CHiPs*. As the phlegm begins, Dorothy is performing multiple hair-flips in the cheesiest photo session to ever see film. Flashback a couple years earlier and she's so clean and pure, she's got her hair in a ponytail and working at an ice cream parlor. Until Paul Snider (*Hill Street Blues*' Bruce Weitz) comes sliming in.

Ever the opportunist, Snider sees big money in Dorothy's big breasts, so he forces her to pose for test shots to send into *Playboy*, which result in a trip to the famed mansion, where Hugh Hefner asks her to stay. Soon, she's Playmate of the Year and shacking up with a Hollywood director played by *Brady Bunch* patriarch Robert Reed (who is playing, although not by name, Peter Bogdanovich).

Dorothy's declining reliance on Snider forces him to go berserk, so he beats the crap out of her, rapes her and finally kills her with a shotgun. "I can't lose no more, baby! I can't!" he cries before pulling the trigger, and then turning the gun on himself. Reed consoles himself with news of his loss by hugging Dorothy's kitten Muffin.

Two years later, Bob Fosse's *Star 80* would do this story bigger and better, but no one did it dumber than *Death of a Centerfold.*

Uncle Sam
(1996)
A-Pix Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Maniac Cop trilogy director William Lustig and writer Larry Cohen reunite for a war veteran revenge fantasy that is surprisingly incompetent, given the above-average work these two have done in the past, both separately and together.

In their pitifully titled *Uncle Sam*, a fallen Desert Storm hero comes alive after rebellious youths burn a flag on his grave on the Fourth of July. Despite being burnt to a crisp, he avenges these un-American crimes by taking their lives, along with those of anyone else he deems less-than-patriotic – such as a Peeping Tom on stilts.

Uncle Sam begins rather soberly and humorless, then does a 180° about half an hour into it, whereupon it becomes your standard slasher film – unimaginative and thoroughly boring. But tune in to see the shameful pre-comeback roles of Issac Hayes and Robert Forster. Or not.

Tapeheads
(1988)
Pacific Arts Video
★★★☆☆

Hard to believe, but a decade ago, *Tapeheads* was the typical independent film. In what must be an embarrassment to them today, John Cusack and Tim Robbins are slacker loser best

friends who start up a video production company. Their dream is to make music videos; the gigs they get instead involve taping living wills, funerals and chicken-and-waffle commercials, until they get their big break cutting a vid for death-metal outfit The Blender Children.

As the two garner heat in the industry, they get unwittingly involved in a sex-tape conspiracy that threatens to cripple a presidential candidate's hopes for the White House (hmmm ... how relevant!). This political angle never gels; the video idea is never taken to full, comedic fruition.

With music video parodies, hip cameos and Clu Gulager's naked ass, *Tapeheads* would like to think of itself as cutting-edge indie comedy. Today, it's awfully dated. It does have its moments of great satire (however weak), absurdity and dialogue – although its finest line (a drunken Cusack exclaiming in a bar, "Sir, I'd like to spank your bald head and then lick it!") was left on the cutting room floor.

The Mighty Gorga
(1970)
Something Weird Video
★★★★★

Nothing ails a financially strapped circus like one big-ass gorilla from the Congo, even if he is some inexpressive chump in a Halloween costume, which basically spells out all you need about the wholly inept, no-budget wonder that is *The Mighty Gorga*. Our smoking circus owner (Anthony Eisley) joins forces with some raven-haired female hunter (Megan Timothy) to track down the elusive gorilla, who is worshipped by a native tribe wearing orange skirts and speaking English.

Padded like a burn victim, *Gorga* features far too much footage of our hunters walking through the forest or climbing a rock. But all that is made up for in a two-minute sequence that stands as one of the most laughable and ridiculous in film history. In it, the hunters are attacked by a dinosaur, made none-too-menacing by the fact that it looks like a toy on a stick. Then Gorga comes along and pummels the hell out of it, in an action-packed sequence shot entirely above the neck.

Gorga also attacks the tribe's village, in a sequence so gripping they have to show it *twice* in its entirety. Later, the hunters enter a cave and find treasure, not to mention a giant lizard cribbed from someone else's movie (it looks like Ray Harryhausen compared to the dinosaur). At one point, the hunters shoot a tranquilizer dart at Gorga, and he falls to the ground ever so gently, as if he were lying his head down on a pillow. The humans soon feel bad, however, when Gorga saves them from certain doom.

"How do you say thanks to a gorilla for saving your life?" asks Eisley, to which Ms. Timothy answers blankly, "I don't know." Um ... try "thanks," maybe? The tape ends with a handful of great trailers, including the Mexican entry *Island of the Dinosaurs* (with a giant armadillo), *Body Snatcher from Hell* and *MoonWolf* ("Half-wolf, half-dog, all-hero!").

Bad Ronald
(1974)
IVE Home Entertainment
★★★★★

Ronald Wilby (Scott Jacoby) is a gangly, awkward teen who goes ga-ga for science fiction and lives with his domineering mother (Kim Hunter). Kids make fun of him, and when one little girl goes too far in her taunts, Ronald accidentally kills her. Bad Ronald! Not wanting to be left alone, Ronald's mom hides her boy within the walls of the house.

After she dies, Ronald uses his tools to make a series of peepholes and trapdoors throughout his lair so he can spy on the house's new residents, a family with three lovely daughters – the youngest of which arouses inappropriate feelings within Ronald's unstable mind. Bad Ronald!

Effectively creepy and suspenseful, *Bad Ronald* is one of those '70s made-for-TV movies that the networks dare not touch anymore. Jacoby is great as the unlikable psycho who steals milk and eggs from the family's fridge, and as much as you don't want him to get caught, at the same time, you can't wait until he gets his.

Prince Valiant
(1997)
20th Century Fox Home Entertainment
★★★☆☆

A very costly – and subsequently shelved – adaptation of the world's most boring comic strips, *Prince Valiant* is actually a decent adventure film, filled with knights, midgets, harems and the famed Sword in the Stone of Arthurian legend.

In this version, Valiant (Stephen Moyer) is sort of a ninny, really, but the Princess of his eye (Katherine Heigl of *Under Siege 2*) is quite a little hottie. As with all medieval tales, she is engaged to another man, but you know that by the time he rescues her more than once, her heart will be for him only. As the story goes, it's a bit slow and less than forward-driven; it's one battle after another, culminating in a nifty bit where our heroes are menaced by a giant alligator. Don't miss the scene in which a would-be suitor is felled by a goblet of hot wax.

The real question here is why such an expensive production was given over to a director like Anthony Hickox, whose resume includes *Waxwork*, *Ticks* and *Amityville 1992: It's About Time*. Here, however, he pulls it off with the same colorful and fluid style he brought to *Fist of the North Star*. Clearly, he wants *Valiant* to be seen in the same old-fashioned, Saturday-morning-serial vein of 1996's *The Phantom*, and he almost succeeds in capturing the fun of that one. If it were a little less cartoony – and many of the scene transitions are animated (poorly) – it might be of a higher class.

Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation
(1994)
Columbia/Tri-Star Home Video
★★☆☆☆

This being the fourth in the series, it's a given that you're going to see an ingenue being chased by Leatherface, chainsaw a-whirlin'. But when said ingenue is a pre-*Jerry Maguire* Renee Zellweger, the curiosity value for *Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Next Generation* goes off the carts.

On prom night, the bookish Zellweger and three soon-to-die classmates have a wreck in the middle of nowhere. They stumble upon a boarded-up dwelling housing the most dysfunctional family this side of the Mississippi. Saws buzz. Meathooks are used. Let's call the whole thing off.

Played strangely for laughs yet defying all rules of logic, this *'Saw* is just as dull as its immediate predecessor, *Leatherface: The Texas Chainsaw Massacre III*. But at least that film had a menacing Leatherface, rather than the tubby guy in the bad wig here (Robbie Jacks), who spends most of the film in drag, sporting pearls. You also get a quote-spouting redneck, a cop who leaves no pore on Zellweger's face unlicked, a final showdown involving a retired couple in an RV and the added bonus of Matthew McConaughey – a mere two years before he started balling Sandra Bullock – as a psychotic trucker with a robotic leg that can be crippled (as Zellweger discovers) by aiming the TV remote control at it.

Rather than kill Zellweger right off, the family has her stay as the terrified guest of honor at their pizza party. That's right, a pizza party – a hackneyed element topped only by a line early in the film when a horny high

schooler tells his girlfriend that if men don't get sex when they want it, they can get prostrate cancer. (Somebody alert Robert Goulet!)

Not so much written and directed as it "sketched out" by original *'Saw* co-creator Kim Henkel, *The Next Generation* should be the last. However, with the success of *Halloween: H20*, they're preparing to unleash *TX2000*. Don't say we didn't warn you.

Striporama
(1952)
Something Weird Video
★★★☆☆

One of the most sought-after vintage burlesque films (due to the presence of Betty Page), *Striporama* is like a bawdy stage show committed to film, warts and all. To give it that big-screen feeling, it begins with a semblance of a plot, as a committee of old farts debate what type of art to include in a time capsule. A few men in the burlesque biz try to convince them that their form of entertainment is the way to go, but the board won't hear of it. To attempt to sway their opinion, a film is shown.

Thus enter the Venus Beauties, each crammed into a form-fitting costume of ill repute for the camera to ogle. A Parisian street corner turns into a twisted *paus de deux* for one hooker and a would-be john. One woman demonstrates the different styles of erotic dancing, from "baby doll" to "wild 'n' woolly," the latter of which requires much violent shaking.

In between the stripping action – totally innocent, as not an inch of forbidden flesh is shown – you get long, one-take comedy skits spilling over with bad jokes, courtesy of reported comedians Jack Diamond, Mandy Kay and Charles Harris.

Cube
(1997)
Trimark Home Video
★★★★★

A small group of total strangers awake to find themselves trapped in a cube with no doors or windows. The cube, however, does have a small passageway on each of its six walls that leads to another cube which has six more passageways, each leading to a seemingly infinite number of seemingly identical cubes. No one knows how they got in the cube, why they are there or how in the hell to get out. To complicate matters, some of the cubes are booby-trapped with your basic array of spikes, flames and flesh-eating acid.

The very definition of minimalist filmmaking, *Cube* is a *Twilight Zone*-ish, thinking man's sci-fi thriller that is remarkably clever, suspenseful and claustrophobic. Visually, *Cube* is fascinating. Mentally, it's equally as gripping, a puzzle film that is a puzzle itself. On its meager budget, the special effects are most impressive, especially in the manners in which a couple of unlucky cube dwellers meet their gory ends at the hands of the traps.

Its ambiguous ending and refusal to explain little will anger some, but is entirely appropriate to the film's mood and intent. It dares you to come up with your own solution to its meaning – and with a little thought, plausibility *can* be found. Skillfully written and directed by Vincenzo Natali, this Canadian-made feature will delight those with patience and a desire for the original, and infuriate all others. It is easily the best movie ever to be put out by Trimark – home of *StarKid*, the Carrot Top movie and all four *Leprechaun* flicks – and makes for an excellent half of a paranoia double bill with π.

The Jayne Mansfield Story
(1980)
USA Home Video
★★★★☆

As far as made-for-TV movies go, *The Jayne Mansfield Story* is as rote as they come: a soapy plot, choppy pace, melodramatic situations and that unmistakable sheen of cheapness. But it also has a classic, unintentional camp performance by Loni Anderson as the buxom B-movie queen who lost her head (both literally and figuratively). And Loni gives it her all, getting by with baring more cleavage than an entire season of *WKRP*.

And for most, that would be enough. But no! This flick earns even cheesier chops for its *other* lead performance, that of Mansfield's muscle-bound hubby Mickey Hartigay, essayed by a then-fresh-to-our-shores Arnold Schwarzenegger. As Jayne descends into drunken stupors, it's hysterical to watch the future Terminator try to play rage. In particular, when Jayne waves to her fans from her bedroom, wearing only a nightgown, Arnie snaps in un-perfect English, *"Dey see too maach!"*

For a film that shows you Loni jumping into Arnold's arms five times too many and *doesn't* show you the assets that made Jayne famous – nor the detachable noggin that made her famous again – it ain't half-bad. It's really, *really* bad.

Brother Russell's Grab Bag
(199?)
N/A
★★★☆☆

Another homemade compendium of found footage cribbed from cable, *Brother Russell's Grab Bag* begins with two legendary choice bits – the prank call by a Howard Stern crony to ABC during the O.J. car chase ("I sees O.J.!") and the skinhead brawl on *Geraldo* – and then never offers anything as much fun in the two hours that follow.

The off-the-air bickering of Sam Donaldson during a taping of *PrimeTime Live* offers promise, but his tantrums never burst into a full-blown ego hissy. Virtually the rest of the tape is taken up by clips of religious broadcasting, including Ernest Angley, Oral Roberts and the truly evil Robert Tilton.

Jailbait Babysitter
(197?)
Continental Video
★★★☆☆

Why this hasn't been picked up by Something Weird yet, I'll never know. The box makes *Jailbait Babysitter* look like a hardcore porno, but in all actuality, it's a wacky teen sex romp in the "style" of *Swinging Cheerleaders* or *Bummer!*

The plot has to do with a girl whose boyfriend is always trying to take her virginity. He even tells her that when she's not pay-

ing attention, he'll "strike." He also tells her he put shag carpeting in the back of the van "just for" her. What a Romeo! In addition to this predicament, when her drunken friends come over and ruin her babysitting job, she leaves the house running, only to be taken in by a high-priced call girl who teaches her the secrets of love. Okay, not love, but dirty, whorish sex. Can't win 'em all.

In one final bout of hilarity, her first john has a heart attack in the middle of her deflowering. Oh, fun! In the end, the call girl sends our heroine on her way, devirginized and ready to spread STDs the world over. Although not a good film by any means, this lost gem of the teen sex comedy era is one of the best examples of this sadly departed genre. It's on a double-length cassette with *The Student Body*, in a huge box so everyone will think you're carrying out porn. —*LF*

Dead of Night
(1997)
N/A
★☆☆☆☆

If Playboy made a vampire film, you'd expect lots of biting and boning. And with *Dead of Night*, they have, and that's exactly what you get. Although neither is all that interesting when you try to present it as art. At least not up against Kathleen Kinmont's mighty bosoms.

Black Gestapo
(1975)
N/A
★★★★★

Like peanut butter and jelly, two great tastes that also go together are black nationalism and Nazi Germany. You're probably saying to yourself, "No way black pride and Hitler go together!" Well, brother, you haven't seen the blaxploitation masterpiece *Black Gestapo*.

Tired of the stereotypical Italian Mafia bosses that run the ghetto after they rape a nurse, a group of angry brothers start "The People's Army" in order to stamp out the white man's menace. Honkies are castrated, and things are good in the ghetto for a while. Eventually, the leaders start getting huge egos (and the sinful taste of white sugar) and start exterminating their own people, Nazi-style – a true blaxploitation picture in every sense of the word.

While darkly filmed with stilted acting, terrible blocking and cheesy action choreography, this film was fun to sit through and thoroughly enjoyable. It makes me wish for a time when these types of films were shown in a regular movie house in a bad part of town. —*LF*

Last Days of Planet Earth
(1980)
Paramount Home Video
★★★★★

It's the end of the world, Toho-style! According to the narrator, Nostradamus predicted the apocalypse, but I think it was Toho who predicted the giant slugs, mutant acid-spewing bats and swinging Japanese hippies toking and driving their motorcycles off a cliff. When the final days do come, I hope this movie is accurate because, man, it's gonna be a party!

The threadbare plot is about a scientist noticing strange things like people catching on fire because it's so hot outside and children who can walk really, really fast. And this is only the beginning. Wait until they go to an island to find that all the natives are now radioactive mutants being protected by the aforementioned bats. Food shortages, suicide cults, earthquakes, floods, thousand-car pile-ups and the mother of all nuclear wars – which breeds two hauntingly creepy zombies who fight over a snake – make the last days kickass.

I've always like Toho's non-monster disaster movies better than their monster movies, because they always go ballistic and hold nothing back, and then try to impart a sensitive message to the audience. I first saw this when I was 10 at 2 in the morning, and it left an indelible impression on me. Well worth your three bucks. —*LF*

When Fembots Attack:
Is Cindy Margolis the only reason to watch *Chairman of the Board*? Well, *duh!*

Chairman of the Board
(1998)
Trimark Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

There's a joke in *Austin Powers* about the "Carrot Top movie" being evil – a joke that no one quite grasped since no one had seen the as-yet-unreleased flick. Now it's out, and I pray that not many more than zero have seen even a few minutes of it. Trust me, it's atrocious, and I'm one who will admit to finding Carrot Top's stage act pee-my-pants funny in small flashes.

The comic basically plays a version of himself – a slacker dude with wacky hair who makes all sorts of crazy inventions using various props. He's about to be evicted from his pad when he inherits a company from an acquaintance multimillionaire Jack Warden, who should be glad he doesn't live past the first 15 minutes (but that was still too long to be able to escape the embarrassing, obviously fake surfing sequence). As you've seen in countless other films where some dimwit suddenly becomes CEO, there's a corporate weasel (in this case, Larry Miller) who plots the new kid's downfall, only to have it backfire on him. Except that when that plot is used in other films, they're not accompanied by cartoonish camera angles and sound effects on par with those used on *America's Funniest Home Videos*.

Laughs should be a prerequisite for a comedy, but I found only one here. Save for a Cindy Margolis cameo as a hottie of a tennis instructor, there's no reason to stick around for it.

John Carpenter's Vampires
(1998)
Columbia/Tristar Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Coming off the heels of several, more successful vampire movies, *John Carpenter's Vampires* (as opposed to, say, *Estelle Getty's Vampires*) lacks the zippy fun of *Blade*, the over-the-top romp of *From Dusk Till Dawn* or the tongue-in-cheek humor of *Bordello of Blood*. It does have lots of violent gore, notably in its clincher of an opening, but as those 15 minutes are up, so is the movie.

James Woods and Daniel Baldwin are vampire hunters for the Vatican, and they travel the country slaying bloodsuckers. But at one sleepy town, the vampire "master," played by Thomas Ian Griffith (from video action dreck like *Excessive Force*), gets the best of them by slaughtering their entire crew, leaving the two with no help but *Twin Peaks*' Sheryl Lee, as a whore who provides them with a psychic link to the man in black. Visceral kicks occur when the vampires are dragged out of their hideouts with a Jeep wench, whereupon they explode with exposure to the sun.

Unfortunately, *Vampires* is so slow that you actually see Baldwin getting fatter as the film goes along. Woods chews up the scenery and spits it right back out between utterings of "amigo," "padre" and "fuck." For some reason, Gene Siskel thought Woods did this so well that he deserved an Oscar nomination for Best Actor, which is as absurd as saying that Roger Ebert wouldn't bust face on Double-Stuff Oreos, given the opportunity.

A Perfect Murder
(1998)
Warner Home Video
★★★☆☆

While the media made a big to-do last year about Gus Van Sant redoing Alfred Hitchcock's *Psycho*, Andrew Davis got away with murder – make that *Dial M for Murder* – and no one seemed to raise a fuss. Maybe that's because it was more of an update than a remake. They were wise to change the title, rather than go with something more modern like *Speed-Dial M for Murder*.

Michael Douglas plays – imagine this! – a crooked, loose-moraled rich guy. His wife, the three-decades-younger Gwyneth Paltrow, is having an affair with a long-haired artist type, played by Viggo Mortensen (also of Van Sant's *Psycho*). When Douglas discovers their dalliance, he offers Viggo (I like to say that name) a cool half-mil to kill Paltrow. He doesn't specifically say to cut off her head and put it in a box, but I say if it worked so well before, why not do it again? His foolproof plan doesn't quite go off as expected. Thus begins a series of blackmailings and double-crossings.

A Perfect Murder is partially satisfying commercial moviemaking, but heavily hindered by its trio of unlikable leads. Not one of them smiles, and they all walk around like they're sleepy and speak in hushed tones. It all looks great, but aside from the execution of Douglas' plan, it is anti-climactic and predictable. Not to mention unbelievable, as Gwyneth's character holds a fairly high position at the United Nations. Oh, Lord, how we pray for our world.

The Prophecy
(1994)
Dimension Home Video
★★☆☆☆

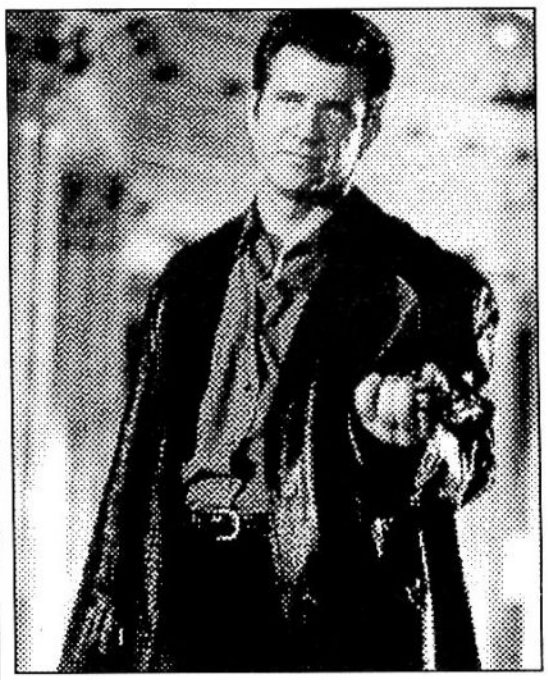
Christopher Walken leads a band of rogue angels who descend to Earth to swallow the blackest souls they can find so that they can overthrow the Lord. Elias Koteas and Virginia Madsen are a cop and an elementary teacher who team up to fight for the good guys. Or something like that. On the surface, the premise is interesting, but executed poorly, in belabored speeches and arid pacing. What little special effects present are well-done, but it all amounts to much ado about nothing. Walken gets off some funny lines, but Gregory Widen's leaden script is otherwise all straight-faced, serious and senseless – everything I'd expect from the creator of *Highlander*.

Fugitive Rage
(1996)
New City Entertainment
★★☆☆☆

The prolific Fred Olen Ray directs a feminist take on the "vengeance is mine" theme when Wendy Schumacher (*Animal Instincts 3*) vows to kill the Mafia kingpin who ordered her sister's death. In the opening courtroom scene, the mobster is acquitted of murder charges, so Schumacher empties six bullets into his chest. With 85 minutes left to go, however, he survives, allowing Schumacher to exact further revenge and for the recuperating Don to get blowjobs from his private nurse.

I shouldn't have to tell you that Schumacher has a catfight in a women's prison, or that she falls for some guy along the way so that they can have sex in the shower, or that someone ends up double-crossing someone else. Above all, I shouldn't have to tell you that Schumacher finally does kill the Italian dude.

But what I'm *dying* to tell you is that after this occurs, an accomplice asks Schumacher, "So what do we do now?," to which she answers, "Have you ever seen *Thelma & Louise*?" and the two chicks smile and high-five. Yes, Wendy, I've seen *Thelma & Louise*, and if memory serves correct, *they fucking died*. Whoo-hoo! High-five!



Payback: Finally, a movie in which Mel Gibson wears pants.

Payback
(1999)
Paramount Home Video
★★★☆☆

If you're unsure to just how brilliant last summer's *Out of Sight* was, watch *Payback* – a crime film that obviously wants *so bad* to be the next *Out of Sight*. It seems to have the right ingredients: an eclectic supporting cast, gritty cinematography, black humor, a groovy soundtrack – everything but expert scripting and direction.

Remaking *Point Blank* (that's a Lee Marvin vehicle, kids, not the Keanu Reeves surfing cop movie *Point Break*), Mel Gibson stars as a lowlife bank robber named Porter who was double-crossed for $70,000 and left for dead by his partner and wife (Gregg Henry and Deborah Unger). With everyone believing him to be dead, Gibson returns to take his money back from "the Syndicate" and execute a handful of goons in the process. Oh, and win back the golden heart of the requisite hooker, here played by *ER* refugee Maria Bello.

Payback obviously has a warped sense of humor, but without the benefit of letter-perfect dialogue, it comes off as corny. One exception follows when Gibson's toes are smashed by mobsters with the mighty swing of an iron hammer. "What happened to you?" Bello asks a bloodied Gibson, who answers, "I got hammered."

Despite the "Get Ready to Root for the Bad Guy" ad campaign, Gibson is playing a variation on the same daffy character he's done since the first *Lethal Weapon*. The star that emerges here is that of Bello, who shines even in her thankless role. Pacing problems plague the critical first half of the film, and it never quite recovers. Still, it's worth seeing ...

but only after your second viewing of *Out of Sight*.

Carnival of Souls
(1998)
Trimark Home Video
★★☆☆☆

Wes Craven – who will attach his name to almost anything nowadays – "presents" this remake of *Carnival of Souls*, the '60s B&W cult classic that still elicits shivers today. This new film, written and directed by some guy named Adam Grossman, has almost nothing in common with the original – so little that any association between the two should be in name only. Nevertheless, he's no Herk Harvey.

One-time *X-Files* hottie Bobbie Phillips portrays a lonely barmaid who, as a child, witnessed her mother being slain by a carnival clown who, in turn, had molested the little girl. Some 20 years later, on the anniversary of Mom's death, she's being haunted by red balloons that start popping up here and there. *Ooh ... spooky!*

Then clowny clown clown Larry Miller (in stark contrast from his usual smarmy comic roles) shows his face and tries to kill her. After he looks at her boobs. Which is understandable.

With the exception of a few near-subliminal cutaways of weird pink dudes who shake, there is nothing creepy in this *Carnival*. The director's big set piece has Phillips trapped in her truck while it goes through a car wash ... *and water starts to leak in! Aaaaaiiiiieeeee!* Not even the scene in which Phillips' would-be paramour turns into Miller – in full clown makeup – while they're humping is creepy. And it should be. Because who wants to see Larry Miller humping? Hell, who wants to see a clown humping?

At times surreal, the film cheats *a lot* by toying with – and sometimes outright ignoring – the chronology. I know that's a device intended to keep you on your toes, but here, it's trying to hide for a lack of imagination.

Vampirella
(1996)
New Horizons Home Video
★★★☆☆

I will see *any* movie based on a comic book, no matter how much the budget can be likened to my take-home pay. Bonus points if it's produced by Roger Corman. As if *The Fantastic Four* experience wasn't fantastic enough for the miserly mogul, he threw some pocket change to director Jim Wynorski and let him have his way with Forrest J. Ackerman's bosomy, black-and-white anti-heroine *Vampirella*.

Talisa Soto – who experienced a career peak with her breakthrough Bond film *License to Kill* and managed only to appear on the radar screen since with *Mortal Kombat* – stars as Vampirella, a space queen from 30 centuries ago who chases Vlad (The Who's Roger Daltrey) across time, space and dimension (via special effects footage no doubt lifted from and recycled in countless Corman efforts previous) after he slays her father on their home planet of Drakulon.

Turning into a poorly animated vampire bat and stowing away on the Space Shuttle on its return from Mars, Vampirella tracks Vlad to modern-day Vegas, where he has assumed the identity of "Jamie Blood," a rock star with hair extensions. Despite all the media play and exposure that comes with being a terrible musician, Vlad somehow has never been discovered by the vamp hunters who work underneath a vintage clothing store.

Vlad's intentions are made known only when the pic's about up, and they involve using satellites to create a nuclear winter on Earth. Vampirella, meanwhile, is turning heads and raising stakes with her next-to-nothing get-up, which is comprised of black boots, a red leather bra-and-panty set and a separate white collar akin to those found on your average Chippendale's dancer. Too bad Soto's got almost zero in the voluptuousness department. Stick someone with more curves in that outfit, and this flick would rate two more stars.

Vampirella and Vlad come to final blows outside the Hoover Dam. In fact, *Vampirella* makes extensive use of its Sin City locations, many of which were used in *Vegas Vacation*. During slow parts, it's fun to try and recognize which locales were used in that film, too. (Hey, that's where Chevy Chase stuck his gum to stop the water flow!)

One would think Daltrey has enough stacks and stacks of royalty dollars at home that he could start saying "no" to these projects. Other curious casting comes in the form of director John Landis as an astronaut and former Playmate of the Year Corrina Harney as Vlad's sex toy. (Next to her, Pamela Anderson emotes like Olivia de Haviland.)

Seventy-six minutes of your time is all *Vampirella* asks you to invest. Since it feels like 45, go for it.

Career Opportunities
(1991)
MCA/Universal Home Video
★★★★☆

One of the films for which John Hughes fell out of favor, *Career Opportunities* is one of my guilty pleasures. It may be slight, abbreviated and void of logic, but I still find it funny. It is the very definition of disposable comedy.

Frank Whaley is a small-town motor-mouthed slacker with a knack for hyperbole who is forced by his father to get a job at Target. Serving as the night janitor, he's scared at the prospect of being locked in the store alone on his first night. That is, until he sees that he's not alone, as the comely town babe Jennifer Connelly has hidden in the fitting room and fallen asleep whilst debating whether or not to shoplift. Hey, I never claimed it was believable. (But with Connelly's clingy white T, who's noticing?)

Sorry to say, but the arrival of twin burglars Dermot and Kieran Mulroney in the film's third act stops things cold. Serving only to complete the then-well-established Hughes' *Home Alone* formula, the robbery angle is one that could have been excised completely. The whole charm of the movie rests on Whaley's character and his winning over a girl he believes to be most unattainable, not foiling a crime spree from far left field.

Then it just sort of ends all of a sudden, leaving you with the feeling that something was left on the cutting room floor. Its running time of under 90 minutes confirms that feeling.

Real Men
(1987)
MGM/UA Home Video
★☆☆☆☆

An utterly lame spy spoof, *Real Men* deserved every bit the critical drubbing it received upon release. Not only is it that bad, it's damn near unwatchable.

James Belushi is a smart-ass CIA agent who recruits an unwilling family man John Ritter to accompany him on a secret mission to give a glass of water to aliens from outer space. No, I'm not joking. The gag is that Ritter is a total wuss, and Belushi keeps having to save his wimpy ass from one dangerous situation to the next.

Belushi fashions a weapon out of a Band-Aid box filled with nails. Belushi makes a miniature spacecraft by poking a pen through a baseball. Belushi swings from a fire escape using only his shoelaces. Belushi fights off a gang of angry clowns. Meanwhile, Ritter is reduced to pointing his finger at bad guys and shouting "BANG!"

Written and directed by Dennis Feldman (who also penned the equally poor *The Golden Child* and the markedly better *Species*), *Real Men* has one funny scene, in which Belushi is clocked on the head by a

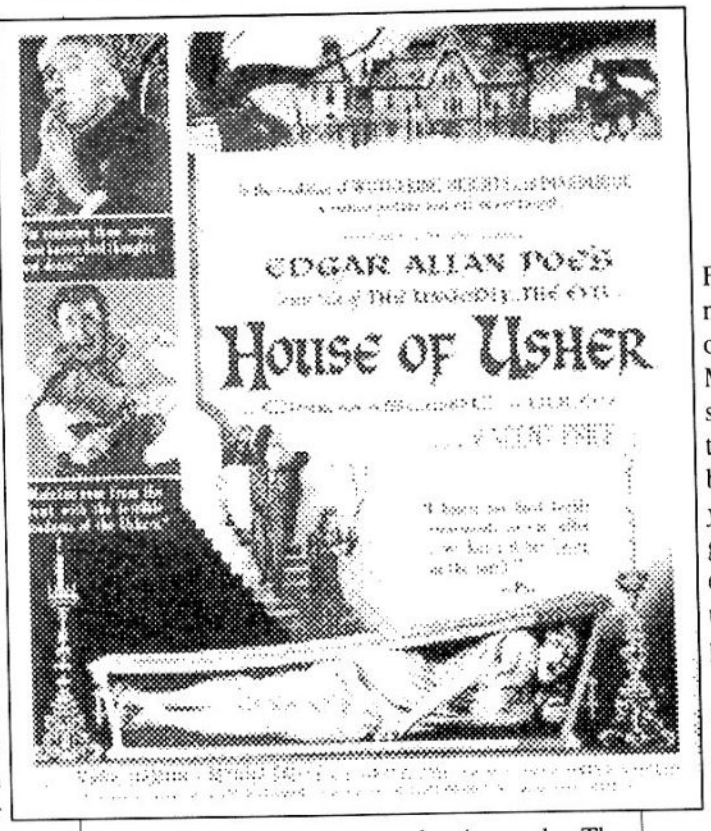
swinging cannonball. But I don't know whether this is funny because it's a good visual joke or because it's a dream come true.

The Fall of the House of Usher
(1960)
Goodtimes Home Video
★★★★★

The very first of Roger Corman's Edgar Allan Poe adaptations, *The Fall of the House of Usher* may also be the very best. It certainly represents Corman's finest efforts from the director's chair, and proves that sometimes a low budget can go a long, long way – a fact that even Corman is apt to forget.

Dashing Mark Damon arrives at the House of Usher, announcing himself as the fiance of Madeline Usher (Myrna Fahey), brother of the odd-as-can-be Roderick Usher (Vincent Price, who would forever become synonymous with the Poe name). The would-be suitor wishes to take his betrothed away, but the evil inhabiting the old mansion prevents her escape.

In a film where the house is essentially the villian, Corman and ace writer Richard Matheson are able to cast an eerie mood and utilize deft pacing to make it work. The shocks are more psychological than visual, but the climax is a noted exception. With marvelous sets and an appropriately sinister score by Les Baxter, the *House of Usher* is one worth revisiting.



Opening the Lost Tombs: Live from Egypt
(1999)
Twentieth Century Fox Home Entertainment
★★☆☆☆

Originally broadcast live this spring on FOX sweeps, *Opening the Lost Tombs* is now available for you to relive in your own home! That means you can see host Maury Povich and an archeologist who speaks very little English crawling through tiny tunnels and finding what I believe to be planted skeletons *any time you like!* Povich was on hand as the ground beneath the famed Sphinx was excavated for the cameras, in between unnecessarily lengthy narration and computer-animated simulations.

Of course, I watched it when it was shown on TV live, if only for the faint prospect that they would be attacked by a mummy. It didn't happen. The crew emerged without so much as a scorpion bite, which really would've livened things up.

All videos reviewed in this section were done so by Rod Lott, except for those marked with an "LF," which were reviewed by Louis Fowler.

HITCH

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Ryun Patterson's
HONG KONG EXPRESS

The snow is mostly melted now, and while the second biggest snowstorm in Chicago history prevented me from sampling the city's swinging nightlife for a time, it did provide a chance to curl up with my brand-new DVD player and sample some video goodness from the mystic East.

First up is a movie I've been aching to sample for a long time: Tsui Hark's ***Peking Blues Opera*** (1986, Megastar). Despite its goofy name, this flick has got it all.

Brigitte Lin, Sally Yeh and Cherie Chung portray a trio of women from different backgrounds who get tangled up in an early-20th century caper full of politics, humor and fairly biting social commentary. Set against the backdrop of traditional Chinese theater (in which only men are allowed to perform), *Peking* seems to be an homage of sorts to the old Republic serials. There are car chases, kung-fu battles, betrayals and tons of fun packed into this disc.

Though it was made in 1986, *Peking* doesn't show its age at all compared to other films at the time. The production values are very high, and some scenes are shot with a sense of beauty and symmetry that makes viewers just say, "Wow." Plus there are three hot chicks.

It's funny, too. Some gags seem straight out of *Monty Python*, but aren't incongruous with the action surrounding them. All in all, *Peking* is one of Hark's best films, right up there with *A Chinese Ghost Story* (and *waaaaay* better than the most recent Jean-Claude Van Damme vehicle, *Knock Off*). If only some of his visionary quality was put to good use stateside.

Next up is a pair of flicks from director Kirk Wong: one made in Hong Kong, the other in the States.

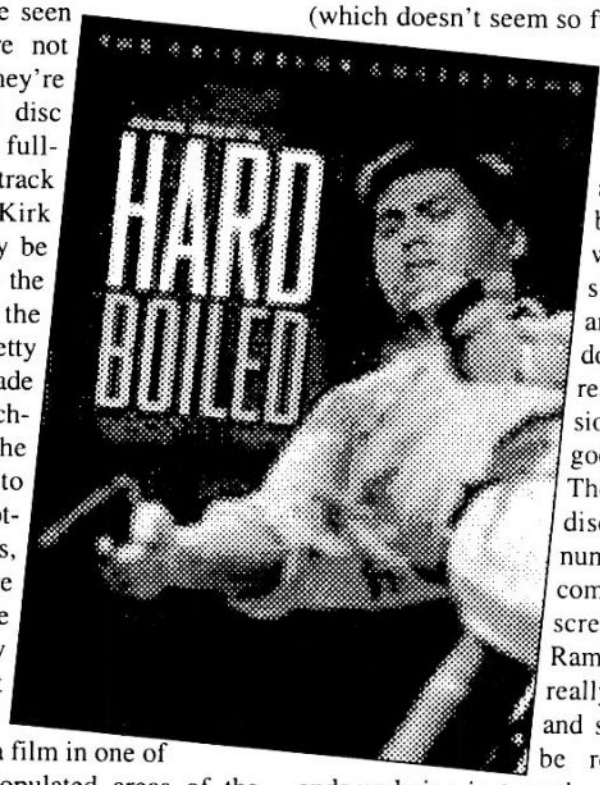
Organized Crime and Triad Bureau (1994, Tai Seng Video) has always been in good hands with Tai Seng. It was one of the first films to get their spiffy video treatment and still is one of their few relatively affordable movies. (Most of their titles are $50 on DVD. *$50?* That buys a *lot* of Ramen noodles). I never understood that, given the plethora of other titles I had heard of and was drooling to pick up.

Even the man in the big hat is wrong sometimes, and this is one of those frequent occasions.

The *OCTB* disc is wonderful. Starring Danny Lee – the cop from John Woo's *The Killer* – *OCTB* exposes the life of a cop who is willing to bend the law in order to get his man – in this case, Anthony Wong (the bad guy in *Hard-Boiled*) and his *fiiine* lady, Cecilia Yip.

OCTB is really an examination of the gray area that lies between police and criminals. The cops aren't by any means all good, and the criminals have some touching moments when they're not booby-trapping doors with grenades, shooting innocent people or robbing jewelry stores.

The DVD video and sound quality are among the best I've seen yet; while they are not Hollywood grade, they're good enough. The disc also includes a full-length commentary track from director Kirk Wong, and this may be the reason DVD is the video format of the future: It took a pretty good movie and made it eminently rewatchable. Some of the things Wong had to deal with while shooting the movie (gangs, police, etc.) are incredible, and the commentary really gives a great insight into the actual process of shooting a film in one of the most densely populated areas of the world. Most of Tai Seng's $50 discs have minimal extras, and I, for one, will be less likely to buy those if there is a chance of them doing a $30 version with quality extras like those on display with *OCTB*.



Wong's first movie after hitting the U.S. was a star-driven action comedy: ***The Big Hit*** (1998, Columbia/Tri-Star Home Video). Mark Wahlberg, Lou Diamond Philips, Bokeem Woodbine and Antonio Sabato Jr. all play hitmen who decide to kidnap the daughter (China Chow, *meow*) of an up-until-recently-rich Japanese tycoon. Wackiness ensues when they find out the girl is the daughter of the assassin's boss (Avery Brooks)! Then action/fight sequences break out like pimples on a teenager's face the night before the prom.

In between the action scenes, there is some really good situational humor. Wahlberg's character, Mel, has an overpowering need to be liked by everyone, you see, leading him to be used and abused by his coworkers, his girlfriend (Lela Rochon), his fiancee (Christina Applegate), his potential in-laws (Elliott Gould and Lainie Kazan) and even his captive. These quirks make an otherwise average film really shine.

Other notable sequences include the opening assassination in a hotel and Woodbine's obsession with masturbation (which doesn't seem so funny when I write it). But the meaty goodness of the first 70 minutes or so of the film are totally ruined by the last 20, which consists of a stupid car chase and final showdown. It leaves a really bad impression of an otherwise good movie.

The extras on the disc, however, are numerous. There are commentaries by the screenwriter, Ben Ramsey (who has a really annoying lisp and seems to want to be really cool, but ends up being just another lucky dork), and a co-commentary by Kirk Wong and executive producer Terence Chang, who has done lots of work with John Woo. Ramsey just talks about how he wanted to make a "hip-hop Hong Kong" movie and all the changes Wong made to the movie, while Wong and Chang add plenty of insight into the stunts and camerawork, as well as the overall "look" of the film. There are also some great deleted scenes featuring Sabato in drag and the obligatory but unremarkable theatrical trailer.

I didn't really understand Wong Kar Wai's ***The Ashes of Time*** (1994, World Video), but that's not to say I didn't enjoy it.

One of the most expensive Hong Kong

films ever made, *Ashes* is a sweeping epic that I'm sure has plenty of symbolism, metaphors and literary allusions in it. I just didn't pick up any of them. In fact, I didn't know what was going on at all the first two times I watched it. The third time, however, wasn't the charm, but it was close ... I think.

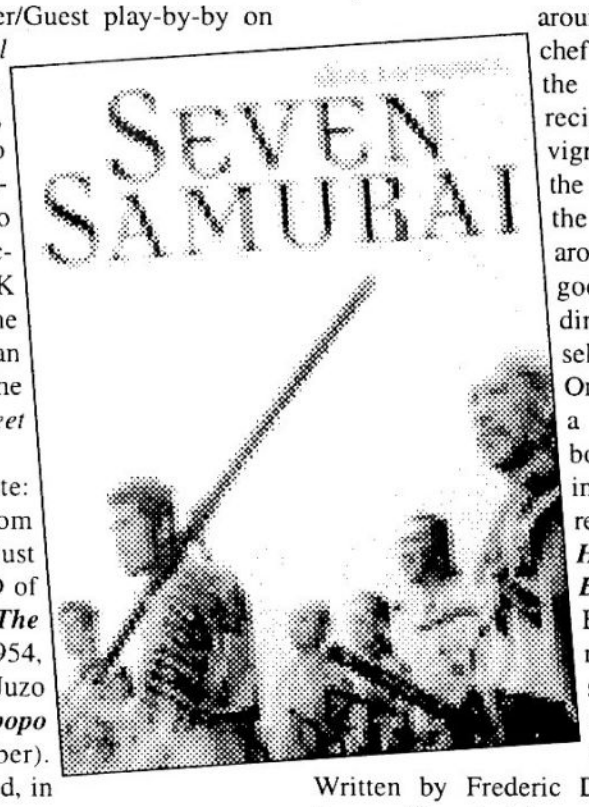
Ashes is about (and don't take my word for it) a swordsman who lives in the desert. People come and ask him to [illegible] people, but he won't. He just sits there. There are several good swordfights in which many people are sliced. A guy who visits him is going blind. There is a reference to the swordsman's lost love. A girl offers him a mule and some eggs to kill bandits. Lots of sand blows in crevices and angst is plentiful.

It's nice lookin', though. Very nice lookin'. Brigitte Lin is in it. She plays twins, I think, or it could be she is a cross-dresser who thinks she's twins.

And that's about all I can gather from it. I knew I should have been warned by the presence of the back-cover blurb from *The Village Voice*.

An interesting side note to this quasi-review is that Wai took a break from post-production of the film because he was burned out; he made one of my favorite films, *Chungking Express*, in the hiatus.

The last HK gem I watched on my DVD player this month was the Criterion Collection's drool-tastic release of John Woo's ***Hard-Boiled*** (1992, Criterion). I love this movie, and Criterion has made a version I will keep with me to my grave. The picture and sound are awesome, and the disc includes a commentary by Woo, Terence Chang, Roger Avary and film critic Dave Kehr, all amounting to the second-best commentary I've ever heard (next to the McKean/Shearer/Guest play-by-by on the *This Is Spinal Tap* disc). There are 11, count 'em, *11*, trailers from Woo films; a wacky student film Woo made; a notes section; a guide to HK action films; and the subtitles/dubbing can be switched on the fly. This is one *sweet* disc.



A footnote: Though not from Hong Kong, I've just picked up the DVD of Akira Kurosawa's ***The Seven Samurai*** (1954, Criterion) and the Juzo Itami comedy ***Tampopo*** (1986, Fox Lorber). Both are really good, in different ways.

The Seven Samurai is, well, a classic. Villagers round up more than six samurai to defend their village from bandits, and what ensues is nothing short of beautiful and thrilling. The video transfer is awesome, and Criterion's restoration of the print makes it look crystal clear. Extras abound on this disc as well, so be prepared to spend plenty of time with it, as the movie runs a good three-and-a-half hours.

Tampopo is a great comedy that is basically about the love of food. Centering around a lonely noodle chef and her quest for the ultimate noodle recipe, several vignettes take a look at the impact of food on the lives of others around the city. Really good. Too bad the director threw himself off a building.

On the literary front, a pair of decent books for the HK inclined are worth a read.

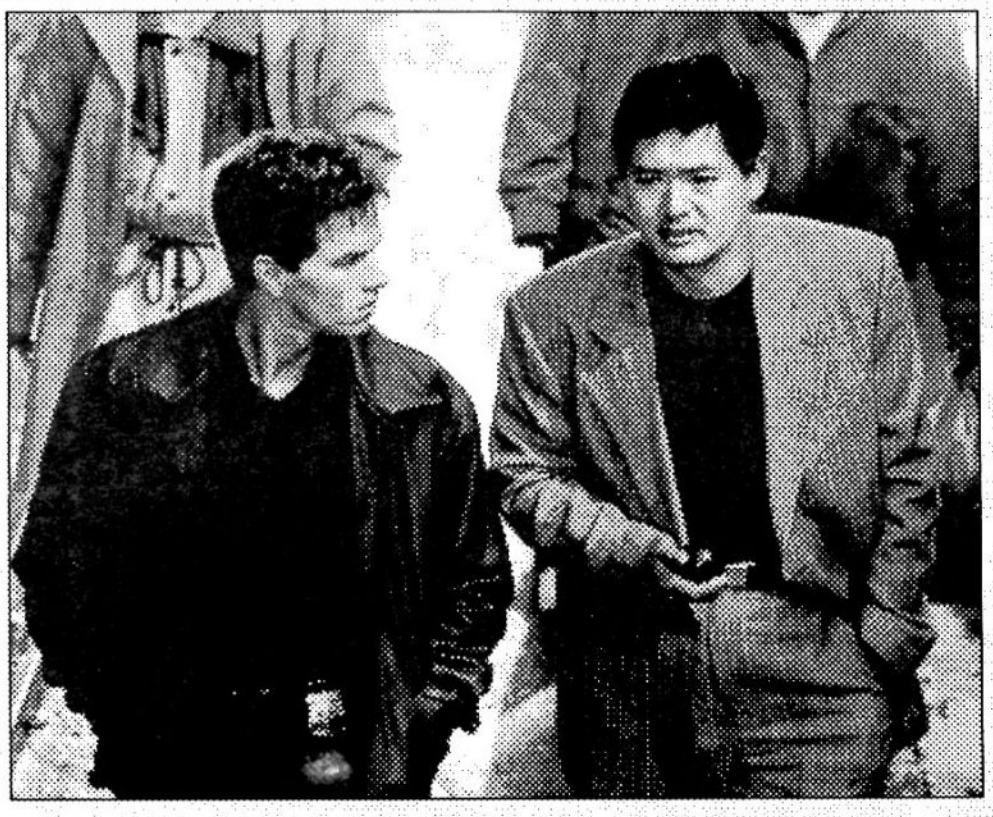
Hong Kong Babylon (Hyperion Books, $12.95) is a reference book of sorts for people who don't know a lot about HK films. Written by Frederic Dannen and Barry Long with a slant toward the seamy underbelly of the industry, it tells plenty of stories about confrontations with gangsters and infighting between the various personalities that comprise the world of HK films. While this first section of the book is interesting, the best parts are to come.

The second section of the book consists of profiles and interviews of stars, many of which are very interesting. John Woo talks about why he doesn't like Tsui Hark, Tsui Hark talks about how he doesn't like John Woo, Leslie Cheung talks about why Jackie Chan didn't get a part in *Farewell My Concubine*, and Chow Yun-Fat is cool and suave. The third part of the book is lists of critics favorite HK films; it is an exhaustive list and very interesting for people who identify with the likes and dislikes of various critics. Alas, Paul Wunder is nowhere to be found.

The big flaw with *Hong Kong Babylon* is its tone. Rather than taking the fun, fan-boyish tone of the best and definitive HK film book – *Sex and Zen and a Bullet in the Head* – there is an almost textbook, lecture-esque quality to the book that brings it down, man.

Asian Pop Cinema: Bombay to Tokyo (Chronicle Books, $16.95) is really cool, though. Fun and inviting, this book combines good writing with great pictures and designs to make a stunning coffee table book. It's great, and the Hong Kong section is well-written and informative.

Well, the HK Express is preboarding for its return trip. I hope it's been a good one for you.



Following *The Replacement Killers*, HK action superstar Chow Yun-Fat takes a second shot at American stardom, co-starring with Mark Wahlberg in New Line's upcoming *The Corruptor*.

alway

(continued from pg. 19)

bit as good as the best of that, having some of the aspects of *Arabesque*, some of the aspects of *Deadfall* and *Rosemary's Baby*. Very sophisticated, very understated. I don't want people who are shouters, I don't want people who are loud. There's never been another record like it. The Loveletter record is almost out, and when you hear that one, don't compare it to serious pop; it's a celebrity record like the Sophia Loren or David Hemmings albums. On paper, I'm already preparing *Songs for the Jet Set 3* and a sequel to *Algebra Spaghetti*, which will be the second Reverie release.

HITCH: What's in store for the second *Algebra Spaghetti*?

Alway: A higher ratio of good tracks, that's for sure. Certainly "Lidsville" will be on it. There will be less covers. The Milky album will be 100 percent covers. And then an individual album on Reverie for Sunshine Day[8] – the most response has been for that, oddly enough. If that is what people want, that's what they're going to get. What you need to say to yourself when you release a record is, "Could any other label release this?" And if the answer is "yes," then it's a failure. I just have to hope that I can carry on. H

[8]Sunshine Day tackles *The Brady Bunch*'s "Sunshine Day" on *Algebra Spaghetti*.

Songs for the Jet Set
Volume 2
(Jet Set)

Even with giant shoes to fill, the sequel does not disappoint. If the *Jet Sets* were Blake Edwards movies, the first volume would be *Breakfast at Tiffany's*, and this one is *The Party*. With a more forward drive than the original's laid-back coolness, *Volume 2* takes snapshots of the '60s as the decade closed into its most tumultuous times. Thus, it should be no surprise to find Nelson Riddle's "Lolita Ya-Ya" here, covered by Kim and Co., or "These Boots Are Made for Walkin'," which appears on the import version. There appear to be more covers this time around, but you wouldn't know it unless you read the songwriting credits, as the *Jet Set* team has gone out of its way to dig impressively deep into the vault of screen gems to resurrect tunes from the pens of Lalo Schifrin, Quincy Jones and the team of Gimbel & Fox that are all but forgotten, if they were even known at all. As with the original, the instrumental outfit designated as Wallpaper handle the strongest material, doubling their workload with four cuts here, from the playful "Toy Boy" to the delicate and beautiful closer, "F for Fake." For exactly 38 minutes and 25 seconds, you will forget your worries, or even that it's 1999.

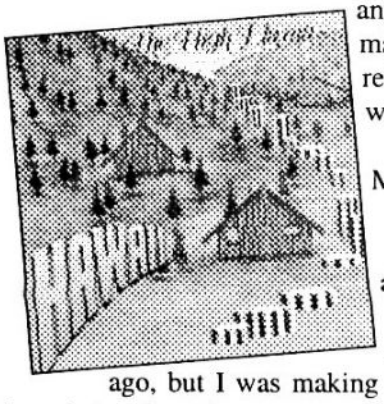
LLAMAS

(continued from pg. 13)

There's a label in Italy called Easy Tempo, and I'm doing a remix for them for Pierre Umiliali.[1] I'm also doing something for a French hip-hop artist. I'll be doing something for a Morricone project with a German label.

HITCH: Now what is that?

O'Hagan: It's a Morricone remix project. There's all this sort of stuff coming out, like there's a Peter Thomas remix project. These guys, their stuff has been totally *referred to*. It's like a game plan for anyone writing at the moment. A lot of material that's been coming out has referred to them, including myself, and we interpret it and remix it.



HITCH: Do you know a guy named Mike Alway?

O'Hagan: I know Mike very well.

HITCH: Have you talked to Alway about doing some stuff with him?

O'Hagan: Mike asked me to do something with him some months ago, but I was making *Cold and Bouncy*. But, you know, I keep in touch, and every now and then, I'll get Mike on the phone and he'll say, "If you're ever available for such-and-such," but so far, I've always been out of the country. But there's always time, you know.

HITCH: Well, I think that's all the questions I have.

O'Hagan: Thanks for doing this. No one's really asked me to do something like this before. I hope there's some information in there so, you know, people can be in touch. H

[1] "Lady Magnolia," featured on *Easy Tempo Experience*.

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